



# 188th BLACK WIDOW AVIATION

Researched & written by 2nd Platoon & Spider door gunner, Dick  
"Cherry Boy" Detra and Black Widow 6, LTC Jack O. Johnson.



**U.S. ARMY**



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*WHERE THE 188th FORMED UP NOVEMBER 1966*



FORT CAMPBELL, KENTUCKY NOVEMBER 1966

188<sup>th</sup> AVIATION CO.

(AIR MOBILE)(LT.)

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## Introduction

I would like to express my appreciation to those of you who willingly supported my passion to document the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company. A special thanks to Sheree' and Kevan Fortney, the typing team, and T&S Printing, Inc. of Lawton, Oklahoma, who were truly instrumental in completing this long overdue history. I am so very grateful to my wife, Karma, who was always there for me through the highs and lows. Last, but not least, I'd like to say thanks to my computer guru, Jeremy Olds.

The highs....finding my old buddies from 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon and the SPIDERS and helping others get in touch with their old buddies. The dedication of the unit colors, eulogy given by LTC Jack O. Johnson and the reading of the 41 names on the WALL by Spider door gunner, the reverend, Dennis Smalley during the July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000 reunion in Washington D.C.

The lows....learning that Bill Sondey, Joe Lane and Stan Moody had committed suicide and that others are suffering from the effects of Agent Orange exposure. Our company areas at Dau Tieng and LZ Sally were exposed to the spraying. At Dau Tieng the defoliant stripped the rubber trees of our shade and it's leaves. We were directed by the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion not to burn the leaves but to bury them and to plant the entire company area with Kentucky blue grass seed that never grew.

I strived to give back a sense of pride in the friendships we shared as Black Widows. The most exciting and terrifying times of my life were 1967 and 1968. On my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, January 29, 1968, I pulled night counter mortar standby at Dau Tieng. It was the beginning of TET '68 and the Black Widows and Spiders were in the midst of kicking some serious ass as we supported the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. I can say that NAM was the defining event in my life.

Not one of us can say that our experiences in Vietnam and the indifference we received after returning HOME, did not have an effect on us. I would like to begin this history with a phrase used by the Spiders when we scrambled for a hot fire mission.....GUNS UP!

CHERRY BOY  
July 4, 2002  
Brisbane, California

## **Reunion 2000, Washington D.C.**



Sitting left to right: Black Widow 6, LTC Jack O. Johnson; 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon & Spider Door Gunner, Dick "Cherry Boy" Detra; 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment's "Chancre 6," Dr. Lyle A. Parker; (standing) 4<sup>th</sup> SIG DET CO, "Static 6," LT Chuck Bagnaschi; 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon Door Gunner & Black Widow songwriter, John Nordenstrom (note Black Widow tattoo on John's right forearm)

## Looking Back

### 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company (Air Mobile)

I looked around me and saw young children, eager and inexperienced, ranging from 18 to 20 years of age. I recognized them because I had seen them before in Korea in 1950. As their First Sergeant, I addressed them as "MEN", but I knew they were children embarking on a new adventure, some never to return. And I looked into the faces of officers observing the same youthfulness and inexperience.

I was 38 years old then, and the oldest man in the unit. How would I train my unblooded NCO's to lead my naive lower grade enlisted men? I knew what the leadership manuals said, "LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE."

In four months we managed to impress, enthuse, and lead a group of soldiers who, in spite of the adverse attitudes of the masses, were eager to leave the good old USA and go to war as their forefathers had. And I dreaded the day when we would sustain our first casualty, and they would realize the severity of battle and the permanence of violent death.

It has been 34 years now, and I can sit and remember names and faces. At Organizational Reunions, I can shake hands with "MEN", survivors of the melee, and feel again the pride and compassion I felt for my "CHILDREN" who have survived and matured.

**Source: 1SG E8 Ramon L. DePalm, Sr., "Big Cambodia," United States Army (Retired)**

### Commander's Foreword to the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC History

Several years ago, I received a call from a fellow named Dick Detra who wanted to know if I was the Jack Johnson who commanded the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC in Dau Tieng and LZ Sally during 1967-68. I had not heard anything about the 188<sup>th</sup> since I had turned over command 30 years previously. I had gone about completing my military career and had retired from the Army in 1977. To say this contact was a surprise would be an understatement, but it has been one which has reactivated a long overdue effort to document the performance of a truly outstanding group of people who served in a very difficult war a very long time ago. The 188<sup>th</sup> was a unit that probably never did receive the recognition it deserved because of a series of traumatic setbacks it suffered as it arrived in country and became operational.

I was on my second tour in Vietnam in 1967 after serving 8 and a half months during 1964-65 flying gunships in the original gunship company in Vietnam, the UTT later to be the 68<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company. I had been wounded in February 1965. After a year of recovery and reinstatement to flying status, I was once again in Vietnam assigned to the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB. I had two possible assignments open to me after I completed a three month assignment as the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB Safety Officer. This job as safety officer was very important because of the many accidents and losses of life that had occurred in the units of the 269<sup>th</sup>. LTC Jim Merryman, our CO, wanted the accidents to stop. We were losing too many aircraft to hostile action to allow any more losses from preventable accidents. I had a free hand to look into any practice going on in any company of the 269<sup>th</sup> and make recommendations to stop the losses directly to Merryman. The 188<sup>th</sup> was under direct pressure due to the high number of accidents that had resulted in the deaths of many crew members in the short period of time the unit had been in the country.

When I was about to finish up my duties as Safety Officer, I let Jim Merryman know that I wanted to command the 188<sup>th</sup> and he let me know that he was willing to let me become the next Commander. I wanted to command the unit because I had observed that it was staffed with good people who had the potential to do an outstanding job, but had really suffered from bad luck and bad decisions. From my first tour I had learned that there were ways to fight and survive and I thought that I could do that. The problem seemed to be: Could I be a nice guy, go easy, and let things go along as they had and meet that goal? The answer was: NO WAY. I think most people assigned to the 188<sup>th</sup> after 10 December 1967 would soon wonder, "What the hell kind of a SOB do we have as CO now?" I was dedicated to keeping everyone possible alive and yet not back away from the combat situations we would eventually get into during my tour as commander.

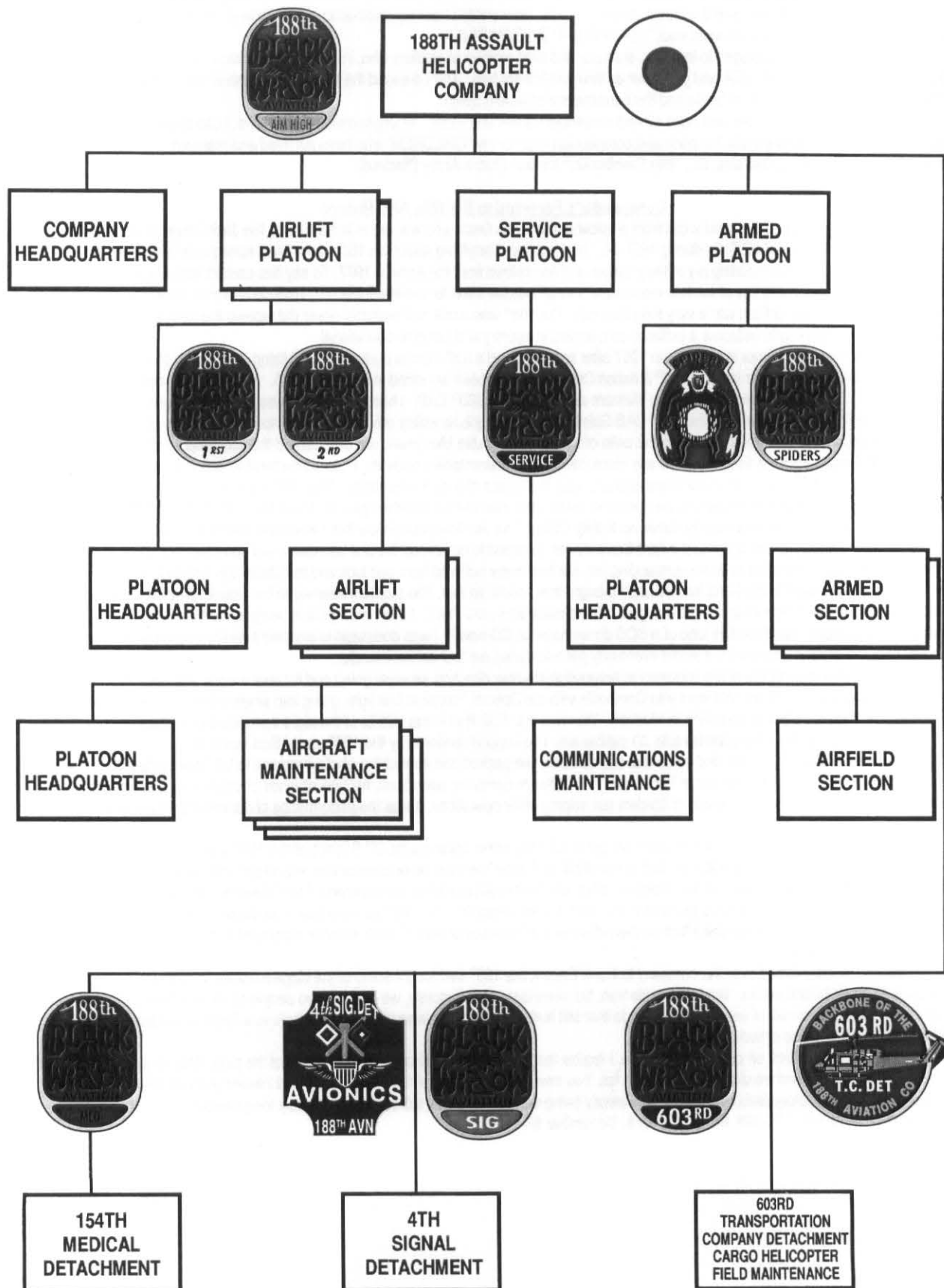
It didn't take long for the entire company to respond to the new direction we were going and for sure we got into some of the fiercest battles fought anywhere in Vietnam. We went into Cambodia with the Special Forces at first light, going into single ship LZ's. We led in Yellowstone, the biggest heliborne operation in Vietnam. We went into FSB Burt in the middle of the night flying in pairs to resupply ammo and med-evac the wounded while under unbelievable .51 caliber fire. The support rendered by the 188<sup>th</sup> saved Burt from being overrun. We fought day and night for two weeks during Tet 68, and when that settled down, we packed and moved the whole company to LZ Sally. In less than a week, we were helping the 101<sup>st</sup> clean up the last of Tet in Hue. In addition to company operations, we flew all kinds of single ship general support missions all over our AO and had fire teams of Spiders out helping other operations. It was the performance of our mission that was truly above and beyond.

We sure didn't get much of a break when we got to LZ Sally either because the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> was lead by a real warrior, Colonel John Cushman. Cushman wanted to "find 'um and kill 'um" more than any other commander with whom I had ever served. He also fought hard and smart resulting in outstanding victories, all of which were supported by our company. From March to the first of July 1968 when the company reorganized into C and D Companies of the 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion, the 188<sup>th</sup> was unequal in performing any mission it was assigned. When C and D Companies were formed the individual performance of duty of each member continued, but the total capability of the cohesive company was gone.

When I proudly turned over the company to Hank Dreher, the 188<sup>th</sup> had fought some of the biggest battles in Vietnam, and we had not lost a life due to direct hostile action. We had people hurt, but none lost. Unfortunately, we had lost two people to an unbelievably bizarre incident of clearly crazy behavior, an act of vengeance and rage that still hurts me today because we lost two people in a fragging incident, who never should have died under those circumstances.

Now as I reflect back on our shared service, I realize that the 188<sup>th</sup> was asked to perform some of the most difficult tasks that any unit could be asked to perform and we did them all without fail. You men of the 188<sup>th</sup> are simply magnificent and I salute you with my deepest thanks for a job well done. This history and others that are currently being written, will finally tell our story. It is truly long overdue.

**Source: Jack O. Johnson, LTC (R), Black Widow 6, December 67- June 1968**





# FORT CAMPBELL, KENTUCKY 1967



**Gun Platoon - Spiders**

- Standing left to right  
 1. , 2. Cpt Carl Jenkins, 3. 1lt Robert M. Wallace - KIA, 4. W01 John E. McTaggart,  
 5. Cpt. Floyd G. Wilson, 6. W01 Johnnie J. Spearman, 7. 1lt Robert Buss, 8. W01 Henry C. Cauthen - KIA  
 Kneeling left to right  
 1. Cpt Glynn Bradley, 2. 1lt Herbert Sims, 3. W01 William C. Sipes, 4. W01 Ross R. Scott  
 5. Cpt Frank R. Kerbl, 6. W01 Elmer Theede, 7. W01 Bruce T. Wright, 8. W01 Robert G. Sween



**1ST Platoon**

- Standing left to right  
 1. W01 Richard Norloff, 2. W01 Jim Ogle, 3. 1LT Richard Savage, 4. W01 Jim Boschulte, 5. W01 Dave Thomas KIA,  
 6. W01 Chuck Restivo, 7. W01 Dean Rankin, 8. W01 Harry Morton, 9. W01 Mike Mullen, 10. W01 Henry Cauthen KIA  
 Kneeling left to right  
 1. 1LT Gerald Smith, 2. 1LT Robert Janes, 3. 1LT Al Glass, 4. CPT Robert George,  
 5. CPT Charles Graham, 6. CPT Ellis Bailey KIA, 7. W01 Reed Phillips, 8. W01 John Sondergroth

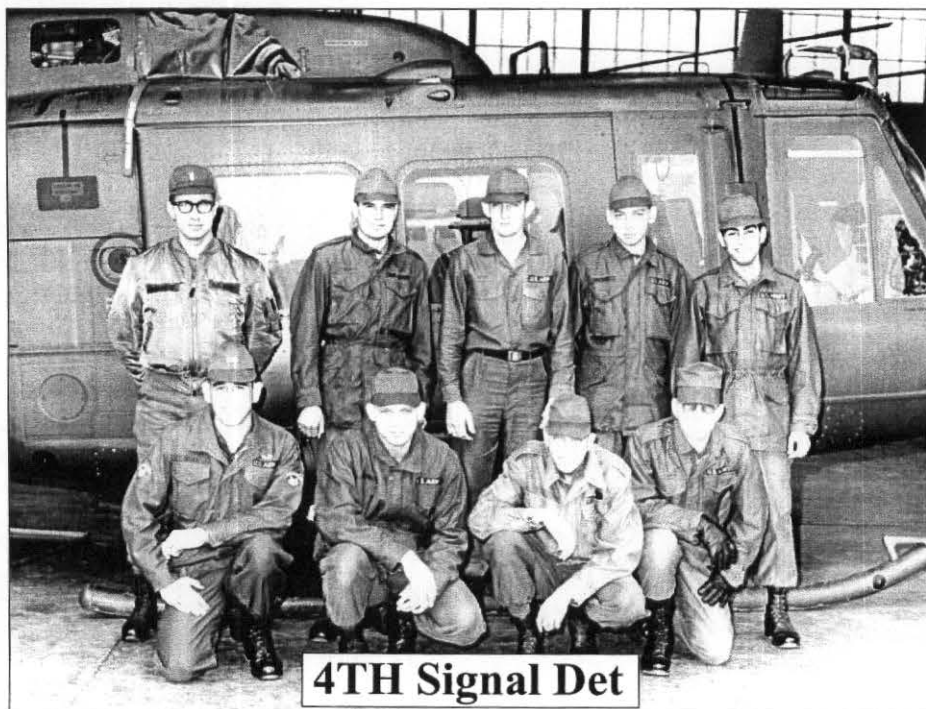


Standing left to right

1. WO1 Alfred L. Snook, 2. 1LT Gerard W. Weis, 3. 1LT Joseph J. De Bella, 4. CPT Arnold D. Amoroso,  
5. CPT Ronald B. Baker, KIA, 6. 1LT Charles J. Maurer, 7. 1LT James R. Poggemeyer, KIA.

Kneeling left to right

1. WO1 Herm O. Fulp, 2. WO1 Gerald L. Racey, 3. WO1 Phillip D. Sharp, KIA, 4. WO1 George D. Charity III,  
5. CPT B. Walter Addy Jr., 6. WO1 William H. Sheehan, 7. WO1 Theodore R. Feidler, 8. WO1 Robert W. Setzer, 9. WO1 Robert G. Sodouski



Standing left to right

1. 2nd LT Bagnaschi, CO, 2. PFC Branch, 3. PFC Scott, 4. SP4 Skerbitz, 5. PFC Racz

Kneeling left to right

1. SP5 Hicks, 2. PFC Austin, 3. John Rementer, 4. PFC Green

Missing from the photo is Raymond Blake and PFC Thomas Clawson

## Unit

On 2 May 1967, the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company was released from the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group and assigned to the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, **Black Barons**. Redesignated as the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company, **Black Widows**. Attached units included the 603<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Company Detachment (Cargo Helicopter Field Maintenance - CHFM), the 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment (medical aid and flight surgeon), and the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment (avionics).

### Authorized Strength

	Officers	Warrant Officers	Enlisted Personnel	Totals
188th	14	53	152	219
603rd	1	1	70	72
154th	1	0	8	9
4th	1	0	8	9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>309</b>

### Call Signs

188 <sup>th</sup>	Black Widow
603 <sup>rd</sup> T.C.	Widow Mender
4 <sup>th</sup> Signal	Static
154 <sup>th</sup> Med. DET.	Chancre
Gun Platoon	Spider
Smoke Ship	Black Widow Smokie

### Individual Call Signs

<b>Black Widow:</b>	
1 Personnel & Administration	16 1 <sup>st</sup> Flight Plt. Leader
2 Intelligence	26 2 <sup>nd</sup> Flight Plt. Leader
3 Operations	36 Spider Plt. Leader
4 Supply	10 thru 29 1 <sup>st</sup> Platoon Aircraft Commanders
5 Executive Officer	30 thru 49 2 <sup>nd</sup> Platoon Aircraft Commanders
6 Commanding Officer	50 thru 69 Spider Aircraft Commanders

Each flight platoon was given a color designation for visual identification in flight: 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, yellow markings; 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, white markings; Spider Gun Platoon, red markings. These color markings for each flight platoon were painted on the cockpit step and on the upper vertical surface of the tail pylon. The Spiders were the first to wear scarfs in the company (bright red) followed by the white scarfs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and the yellow scarfs of the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon.

## Lineage — 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company

Constituted 23 September 1942 in the Army of the United States as the 2026<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Truck Company, Aviation. Activated 1 October 1942 at Lockbourne Army Air Base, Ohio. Inactivated 15 April 1946 in Japan. Converted and redesignated 1 August 1946 as the 2026 Transportation Corps Truck Company. Redesignated 1 November 1966 as the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company (Airmobile Light Aircraft), allotted to the Regular United States Third Army and activated at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Campaign Participation:

World War II  
New Guinea

## Redeployment Activities

Under the operational control of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company, Air Mobile Light (AML), was activated on 1 November 1966 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and assigned to the 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion. After the arrival of all personnel, along with 23 of Bell Helicopter's new model UH-1H and eight UH-1C Hueys, training commenced on 15 December 1966. The 188<sup>th</sup> performed many missions in support of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, participating in two field training exercises (FTX). The FTX's and missions conducted were oriented toward flying tactics presently used in Vietnam. Hopefully, the four months of training in the cold and snow of winter, giving



each pilot an average of one hundred hours, would be of value during the unit's tour of duty in the jungles of Vietnam. Live fire training was conducted at Fort Rucker, Alabama by the company's gun platoon pilots. The unit experienced the transition from the M-14 rifle to the M-16. The original door gunners were all volunteers from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In early March, 1967, our gun platoon pilots flew the eight Charlie model aircraft to Sharp Army Depot in Lathrop, California. The H models used for training were left at Fort Campbell. The 188<sup>th</sup> Company was the first to put 1,000 hours on the new H model. Twenty-three new H models were acquired at Sharp Army Depot, disassembled, shrink wrapped in plastic, and trucked to Alameda Naval Air Station and loaded on the USS Kula Gulf for deployment.

### **Deployment**

On 23 February 1967, the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company received a directive for a Permanent Change of Station. The coordinated move by air and sea would be made in four deployment groups. Leaves varied depending on each group's departure date.

Group one departed from Mobile, Alabama on 30 March 1967 aboard the Merchant Marine Ship USS Allison Lykes. The thirty day voyage took them through the Panama Canal en route to Newport Harbor Terminal, Saigon, arriving on 30 April 1967. Seventy-five tons of equipment were offloaded. Part of the company arrived from Dau Tieng to help assist the 7<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion who were responsible for III Corps motor transport. The 7<sup>th</sup> Supply and Transportation staging area in Long Binh was used as a holding area until the convoy was loaded and ready for the drive to Dau Tieng which was the end of the line.

Group two departed from Alameda Naval Air Station on 22 April 1967 on board the carrier USS Kula Gulf. The 189<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company and a Mohawk fixed wing company were also on board. Thirty-one shrink wrapped Hueys along with eleven conex containers full of repair parts and tools arrived at Vung Tau on 6 May 1967. On 23 May 1967, Black Widow pilots ferried the assembled aircraft to Dau Tieng. The conex containers were transported by Air Force C-123, Providers.

Group three, under the command of Major James Rungee, departed from the Hopkinsville Regional Airport using a commercial flight. Personnel had to turn in their 38 caliber Smith & Wesson pistols. They were placed in a box and sealed up and given to the pilot of the commercial carrier. The plane was a twin engine turbo prop. They flew by Bowling Green, KY then Louisville, KY where they flew right by Church Hill Downs. They took some pictures of Church Hill Downs from the air. They flew to St. Louis, MO where they boarded a TWA jet for San Francisco, CA. They left the bay Area and were supposed to fly to Yokota, Japan. However, strong headwinds and the pilot of the World Airways, Boeing 707 said they would need to turn around and head for Anchorage, Alaska for fuel. Once in Anchorage there was another delay because of an engine problem. It was eleven in the evening and the sun was still shining — that was a real sight. The lobby of the airport in Anchorage had a huge brown Russian bear standing on its hind legs. It must have been twelve plus feet tall. They finally left Anchorage and made it to Yokota, Japan. The Japanese did not want anyone to deplane while the aircraft was being refueled. They arrived in daylight, which was not supposed to happen, but eventually they were allowed to deplane and stretch their legs. Next stop was Bien Hoa AFB, and from there they were flown to Dau Tieng.

Group four, under the command of our Commanding Officer, Major Bobby Wofford, lifted off from Fort Campbell on 28 April 1967. The main group, with full combat load and weapons, departed on four Air Force C-141's. The flight took the same route as the advance party. Arriving on 30 April 1967 with the remainder of the unit, Major Wofford was met at Bien Hoa Airfield by the 12<sup>th</sup> Group Executive Officer, LTC Sheppard. The Company was then airlifted by C-130's to Dau Tieng. Major Wofford was flown to Cu Chi, home of the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, where he would be briefed by LTC James H. Merryman, the Battalion Commander. The 188<sup>th</sup> set up shop in one of the hottest and most isolated areas of operation in the western III Corps.

<b>Campaigns</b>	<b>Decorations - Unit Awards</b>
Counter Offensive Phase II, 1 July 1966 - 31 May 1967	Meritorious Unit Commendation, Vietnam 1967
Counter Offensive Phase III, 1 June 1967 - 29 January 1967	Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Vietnam 1967
Counter Offensive Tet 1968, 30 January 1968 - 1 April 1968	Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Vietnam 67 - 68
Counter Offensive Phase IV, 2 April 1968 - 30 June 1968	Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Vietnam 1968
	Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class, Vietnam 1967 - 68

### **Unauthorized**

During Operation Rapid Fire V, team members from the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Detachment B-36, teams A361 and A362, presented the coveted 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces red, white and blue scarf to all flight crews who had volunteered for the top secret operation into Cambodia.

### **The Ed Sullivan Show**

In December of 1967, the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade held a music competition among all the battalions in the brigade. The USO, who was tasked with coordinating and judging the competition, provided guitars and drums. The winners would be flown back to New York to appear on the Ed Sullivan Christmas Special.

The 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company had the good fortune of having a mixed bag of talented musicians and singers in the ranks. On any given evening, if you listened real close, you could hear the sound of guitar music drifting through the company area. The 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, located at Cu Chi, held the competition at the "Black Barons" Officers club. The Black Widow group included our light surgeon, Captain Lyle "Doc" Parker (lead guitar and vocals), 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon Warrant Officers, Reed Phillips (announcer and vocals), J.J. Spearman (bass guitar and vocals), George Talley (vocals), Kjell Tollefson (vocals), Ken Pokorski (vocals), George Jones (vocals), Wesley Gager (vocals), and our armament NCO, Dave Miller (drums). Since this was an Officers only competition,

Dave Miller had to impersonate a Warrant Officer and was ushered through a back door just prior to their turn to perform. They sang "House of the Rising Sun" by the Animals and an original song about Dau Tieng. When they made it to the final two groups, they were given permission to wear civilian clothes. The BlackWidows won the competition over her sister units (116<sup>th</sup>, 187<sup>th</sup>, 242<sup>nd</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and the 269<sup>th</sup> HHC) and were awarded a trophy. Unfortunately for our guys, they didn't make it to the Ed Sullivan show, but they did win bragging rights within the battalion. It made Christmas a little bit sweeter for the Black Widows, and it was a good morale booster.

### **Command and Control**

The following are the Commanding Officers (CO), Executive Officers (XO), and First Sergeants (TOP) assigned to the 188<sup>th</sup> and its detachments.

<b>188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company</b>		<b>603<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Detachment</b>	
<b>CO:</b>		<b>CO:</b>	
Major Taylor	1 November 1966 - 24 November 1966	Major Gary P. Beaulieu (Boyer)	25 November 1966 - 15 April 1968
Major Bobby E. Wofford	25 November 1966 - 25 June 1967	Captain Thomas Castro	16 April 1968 - 1 July 1968
LTC James H. McWhorter	26 June 1967 - 9 December 1967	<b>XO:</b>	
Major Jack O. Johnson	10 December 1967 - 10 June 1968	CW2 Douglas McFarland	25 November 1966 - 15 April 1968
Major Henry E. Dreher	11 June 1968 - 1 July 1968	<b>TOP:</b>	
<b>XO:</b>		First Sergeant E8 Ramond Caudle	1 November 1966 - 31 May 1967
Major James Rungee	25 November 1966 - 11 July 1967	First Sergeant Laymon	1 June 1967 - 1 June 1968
Major Joe Sites	12 July 1967 - 11 December 1967		
Major Charles Graham	12 December 1967 - 11 February 1968		
Captain John W. Schaibly	12 February 1968 - 19 May 1968		
Major Richard G. Adamski	20 May 1968 - 1 July 1968		
<b>TOP:</b>			
First Sergeant E8 Ramon L. DePalm, Sr.	1 November 1966 - 19 December 1967		
First Sergeant E8 Pearl E. Ackley	20 December 1967 - 1 July 1968		

<b>154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment</b>		<b>4<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment</b>	
<b>CO and Flight Surgeon:</b>		<b>CO:</b>	
Captain William E. Atlee	25 April 1967 - 6 September 1967	1LT. Charles L. Bagnaschi	25 November 1966 - 13 April 1968
Captain Phillip A. Snodgrass	7 September 1967 - 17 December 1967	W.O. Edwin J. Rudzinski	14 April 1968 - 1 July 1968
Captain Lyle A. Parker	12 December 1967 - 4 June 1968		
Captain John Hannah	5 June 1967 - 1 July 1968		

### **Temporary Duty Assignments (TDY)**

1.	OPCON to the 10 <sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion in support of the 9 <sup>th</sup> Republic of Korea (ROK) White Horse Division and the Capital Tiger Division at Phu Hiep, II Corps. Operation KIL TONG HONG	7 July - 21 August 1967
2.	OPCON to the 5 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces, Detachment B-34 and local Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Montagnards at Cau Song Be Special Forces Camp, III Corps	September - October 1967
3.	OPCON to Navy Seal Team One at Nha Be, III Corps for tactical air support and close in fire support. Operation Game Warden	November - December 1967
4.	OPCON to the 5 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces Detachment B-36, Teams A-361, A-362 and FREECAMBODIA (Khmer Serei Freedom Fighters) under Major Bo Gritz. Command Post: Tay Ninh East, III Corps. Operation Rapid Fire V	6 December 1967 - 24 January 1968

## A black and white photograph of a collage of military flags and streamers. The flags feature the number '188', the letters 'AHC', and the text 'VIETNAM 1967-70' and 'VIETNAM 1967'. The streamers are labeled 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE I', 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE II', 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE III', and 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE IV'. The collage is composed of several overlapping elements, including flags with the number '188' and 'AHC', and streamers with the text 'VIETNAM 1967-70' and 'VIETNAM 1967'. The streamers are also labeled 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE I', 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE II', 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE III', and 'COUNTEROFFENSIVE PHASE IV'. The flags are dark with light-colored text and graphics, and the streamers are light-colored with dark text. The collage is set against a dark background.



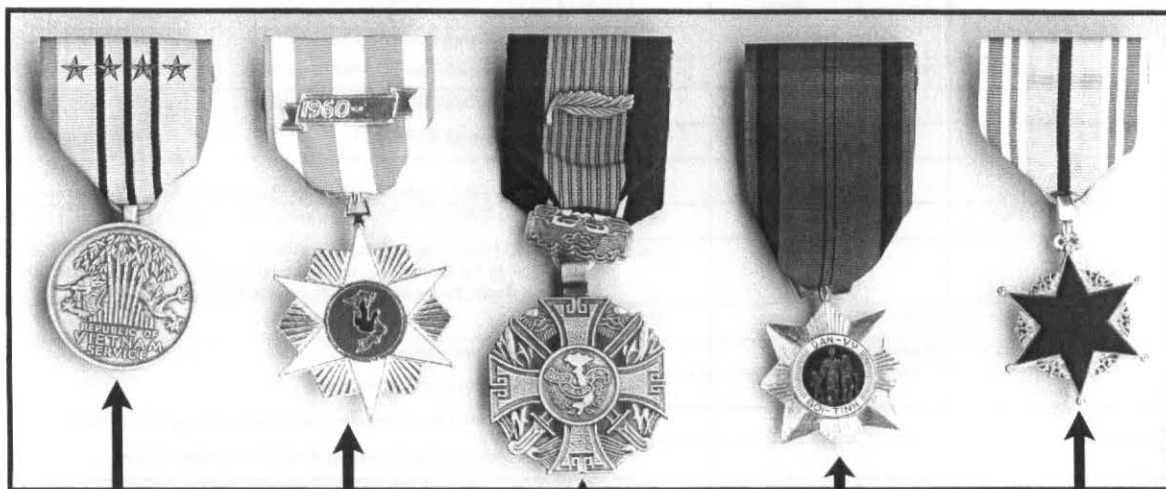


188TH AHC FLAG WITH CAMPAIGN STREAMERS AND UNIT AWARDS FOR SERVICE IN VIETNAM.



Dick Detra Collection

INDIVIDUAL MEDALS AWARDED MEMBERS OF THE 188TH FOR SERVICE IN VIETNAM.



VIETNAM SERVICE  
MEDAL W/4  
CAMPAIGN STARS

VIETNAM CAMPAIGN  
MEDAL

VIETNAM CROSS OF  
GALANTY WITH  
PALM

VIETNAM CIVIL  
ACTION MEDAL

VIETNAM WOUND  
MEDAL  
(ANY MEMBER WHO  
WAS WIA WHILE  
SERVING WITH THE 188TH)

# Black Widow Helicopter Tail Numbers

The 188th was the first aviation company to arrive in country with the new UH-1H and UH-1C Bell helicopter. On July 1, 1968 the Black Widows were re-designated as Charlie Company, 101st Aviation Battalion. The Spiders became the 3rd platoon of Delta Company (HAWK), 101st Aviation Battalion. The original flight crews had assigned helicopters. After the infusions started this practice changed. In '70 and '71 only the crew chiefs had an assigned helicopter.

*\* Indicates the 31 original helicopters of which 29 were damaged and 50 men WIA during a 100 round mortar barrage at the "WEB" (03 runway) on June 24, 1967 at 11:02 PM. Hanoi Hannah had welcomed the 188th to Dau Tieng over the company radio net...telling them that the Viet Cong would wipe the BLACK WIDOWS out within 30 days...she wasn't off by much, within minutes we were non-operational. We averaged 3 mortar attacks a week up until November 1967...from then on, till we moved to LZ Sally in March 1968, it was nearly a daily routine for them to try and take out our hueys.*

Tail #	Platoon	A/C	Call Sign	Crew Chief	Door Gunner	Remarks
GUNS						
* 66-00706	Spiders	Witwicki	Spider 53			M3 system-Got up during 6/24/67 mortar attack, took out four enemy mortar tubes NW of Dau Tieng Operation Hong Kil Dong
* 66-00707	Spiders	Wallace-KIA Poggemeyer		Van Lant-KIA	Noel-KIA	Mid-Air 7/31/67-total loss-all on board KIA Operation Hong Kil Dong
* 66-00708	Spiders	Hall Smith	Spider 50	Oates	Van Lant	12/11/67 engine failure – autorotation Operation Hong Kil Dong
* 66-00709	Spiders	Sipes Youngblood		Cabigon		6/8/67 took 2 hits, damage to armament system – 7/25/68 took 3 hits, damage to the fuel cell & tail rotor
* 66-00710	Spiders	Cauthen-KIA Davie-KIA		Altwood-KIA	Williams-KIA	Mid-Air 7/31/67-total loss- all on board KIA Operation Hong Kil Dong
* 66-00711	Spiders			Staley	Lamb-WIA Pierpoint	HOG 6/22/67 shot down @ Rach Kien 11/1/67 shot down @XT501345 2/12/68 hit by ground fire 3/6/68 hit by ground fire
* 66-00712	Spiders			Taylor	Smalley	"NICK! II" Destroyed on ground 6/24/67
* 66-00713	Spiders			Cabigon		Cabigon WIA, helicopter took 4 hits
				Cain	Pierpoint	40mm cannon "Super Frog" changed @ LZ Sally to "Eradicator" 11/1/67 shot down @XT501345
				Parrish	McCloud	1/11/68 shrapnel damage from mortar attack @ the "WEB" Dau Tieng
				Bobo		
64-14167	Smokie I	Sipes		Cabigon	Pierpoint	12/14/67 shot down @ XT477475
		Walker	Spider 68	Staley	McCloud	2/5/68 Walker hits tree-McMillan WIA
64-14170	Spiders					From playboys XM21 Minigun system Shot down @ XS842801
66-00668	Spiders					8/4/68 – hit by anti-aircraft @ Ta Bat airfield, Ashau Valley, crashed.
66-15087	Spiders	Wright		Johnson	Smalley	"COLD SWEAT"- FROG 40mm cannon- Operation Hong Kil Dong-crashed
				Parrish	Searles	8/4/68 Harry Kim KIA-Clark and Burton Escape and Evade enemy – shot down @ Ta Bat, Ashau Valley, destroyed by Spider gunships after being shot down, hit by anti-aircraft, crashed in 3 pieces
		Clark	Spider 44	Kim	Burton	
66-15089	Spiders	Gaskins	Spider38			Flown in the states by Geoff Handel XM21 Minigun system sold to an undisclosed Latin American Country 1/27/68 went down with foreign object damage@XS630890 8/4/68 shot up bad covering #15087 in A Shau Valley

Tail #	Platoon	A/C	Call Sign	Crew Chief	Door Gunner	Remarks
66-15173	Spiders	Mullen	BW29	Bartleson - WIA	Wooley - WIA	11/22/67 engine failure - crashed in the Nha Be River
				Crain	Smalley	Watts KIA - Mullen saved Wooley from drowning
					Hertling	
66-15179	Spiders			Goodpaster	Lamb	"SATISFACTION" XM21 Miniguns -only C model with Spider nose art
		Walker	Spider 68	Allen	Detra	Soares last flew this gunship in CT ARNG 6/11/78
		Soares	Spider 65			
66-15208	Spiders					Ga Nat Guard
66-15664	Spiders					Operation Hong Kil Dong
66-15068	Spiders					
66-15069	Spiders					
66-15091	Spiders					
66-15093	Spiders					
66-15229	Spiders					2/17/68 took hits to armament system and flight controls
66-15240	Spiders					Flown by Soares on his 25th B-Day, 10/24/68
65-09471	Spiders	Soares	Spider 65			"CLIMAX" XM48 HOG System - 5/29/68 lost RPM autorotated into the jungle - destroyed 9/4/68 during typhoon Bess
66-15525						
66-15668	Spiders	Clark	Spider 44	Staley	Searls	9/21/68 crashed after getting tangled in concertina wire during takeoff
66-15680	Spiders					
66-00739	Spiders					
66-15562	Spiders			Henry		8/4/98 - sustained 12 hits, one hitting the chest protector of the A/C, resulting in WIA @ Ta Bat Airfield, Ashau Valley
<b>Slicks</b>						
* 66-16089	269th	Merryman	BB6	Alley		"WICKED WAHINE" Black Baron 6 C&C ship on loan
		Gurica	BW18	Ramirez	Cope	to LTC Merryman until unit moved to LZ Sally
		Crawford	BW46		Burrell	6/26/69 Engine failure, hard landing, aircraft landed on stacked sandbags
* 66-16105	1					
* 66-16106	1					
* 66-16107	1					10/21/67 transferred to 187th
* 66-16108	1					
* 66-16109	1	Elliot	BW39			1st platoon leader-6/4/67emergency med-evac mission
		Witwicki	Spider 53			6/24/67 went down at Duc Hoa
						Operation Hong Kil Dong
						11/22/67 hit by ground fire @ the "WEB" Dau Tieng
						12/27/67 multiple shrapnel holes during mortar attack @ the "WEB"
* 66-16110	1					
* 66-16111	M			DeGregory	Robinson	Shot down in War Zone C - Operation Hong Kil Dong
						12/29/67 shot down @XT1868 12/31/67 Total Loss to inventory
* 66-16112	2	Rhodes	BW44			6/2/67 - went down 6/17/67 took 1 hit in cockpit
* 66-16113	1	Ogle	BW10	Diuski	Gray	Operation Hong Kil Dong 6/22/67 - took 5 hits, damage to tail rotor and flight controls 9/25/67 Spider Pilot Alexander has rocket tube malfunction, hitting 16113 with shrapnel
		Thurston	BW13			"POLISH POWER" left on hill in Cambodia during
		Pokorski	BW48			Rapid Fire V - took 50 cal. through the engine, was recovered
		Handel	BW26			
* 66-16114	1	Rankin	BW17	Thibault		1/31/68 took several AK47 hits flying over VC platoon
* 66-16115				Stocstill		1/11/68 took direct RPG hit in the 603rd maintenance area
* 66-16116	1	Hill	BW16			Operation Hong Kil Dong -2/12/68 engine failure @ Hoc Mon-total loss
		Handel	BW26	Denning	Wilson	WO1 Stubbs WIA and evacuated back to the US

Tail #	Platoon	A/C	Calf Sign	Crew Chief	Door Gunner	Remarks
* 66-16117	1					7/1/67 took two hits en route to Lai Khe
		Ogle	BW10			7/17/67 While on short final main rotor blades hit tree limb
		Rankin	BW17	Thibault	Fenton	Engine failure, autorotation, landed in rice paddy on right side, total loss
						Operation Hong Kil Dong
* 66-16118	1	Glass				6/10/67 received ground fire
		Janes				6/23/67 engine failure @ Rach Kien
* 66-16119	2			D. Smith		
		Sodouski		Trueblood	Detra	8/30/67 Trueblood WIA in the Horseshoe, ship took 33 hits.
		Maurer	BW42	Trueblood	Detra	
		Maurer	BW42	Merlock	Detra	"Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds (LSD)" tail rotor shot
		Sanchez	BW49		Murphy	off & crashed - 2nd platoon leader's bird-Operation Hong Kil Dong
		McCrady				12/27/67 Damage from mortar attack @ the "WEB" Dau Tieng
* 66-16120	2					6/17/67 went down @ Minh Than - 7/1/67 took hits en
						route to Lai Khe - Operation Hong Kil Dong 10/17/67 night op -
		Crow	BW38	Bartels		12/28/68 M/R blades struck bush while on extraction & med-evac in hot LZ
		Rowles	BW12	Garich		Mechanical Failure/Total Loss 3/28/69
* 66-16121	2	Sadouski		Matt Hitzemann		"Hoocher" 12/9/67 Loss of tail rotor drive, autorotation - 3/8/68 engine failure @ the Race Track in Saigon
		Beebe	BW11			
		Riley-KIA		Tuel - WIA	Sparks - KIA	10/24/68 - hit in the air by a mortar round, crashed
		Smith-WIA				& burned - total loss-in support of D/2/501 Raiders
* 66-16122	2	Setzer	BW35	Haber		9/22/67 WO1 James T. Donahue KIA during Eagle Flight into a cold LZ by VC sniper.
		Talley		Wingerd	Matthess	"RAGIN CAGIN"- 6/2/67 went down - 7/31/67 sergeant flying with Maurer
						picked up to hover and hit revetment with stinger and tail boom
						10/31/67 shot down-Operation Hong Kil Dong-12/29/67 engine failure
						1/4/68 left in LZ Rosie after being hit by an RPG
						During Rapid Fire V Cpt. Dohrt and Wingerd WIA evacuated back to the USA
* 66-16124	2			Phillips	Sparks	7/1/67 took two hits en route to Lai Khe
						Operation Hong Kil Dong
		Metcalfe	BW13			1/3/69 blades strike tree on liftoff from tight LZ, sudden stop.
* 66-16125	2	Restivo	BW27	Urfer		On final approach, M/R blade struck a tree limb
						Operation Hong Kil Dong
		Morrow-KIA	WM6	Green-KIA		10/13/67 - Destroyed during test flight @ Dau Tieng
* 66-16126	2	Charity		Goodpaster	Hitzemann	6/17/67 CV2 took off and contacted M/R blade of 16126
				Larson	Mendyk	Operation Hong Kil Dong
		Pentilla	BW44			Flare ejected from canister into the M/R blade
* 66-16127	2	Baker		Goodpaster	Hitzemann	6/21/67 Aircraft struck some barbed wire in LZ.
		Fulp	BW44	Alley	Piecuch	Operation Hong Kil Dong - "Hanger Queen", stripped no engine, no tail boom, rebuilt and flown to LZ Sally
				Moore	Norris	
65-09865		Winton				6/23/69 main rotor blade contact with 66-16472 while in the process of landing.
65-10068						Fort Stewart, Ga. National Guard 1997
66-01126						
66-16026						
66-16096						1/23/68 engine failure @ the "WEB" Dau Tieng
						3/10/68 down with engine problems
66-16128						

Tail #	Platoon	A/C	Call Sign	Crew Chief	Door Gunner	Remarks
66-16129						
66-16131	2	Jones	BW43	Moore	Piecuch Norris	"SUMMER WINE"
66-16142	2					6/31/67 Took a AK47 hit into engine, continued flight 1/22/68 went down @ XS713794 trans/rotor head problem
66-16148						
66-16149						
66-16150						
66-16152	2	Spearman	BW23	Hitzemann		9/27/67 took AK47 hits through the floor and into rotor blade @ XT588402 10/5/67 engine failure - autorotation - hard landing
66-16155	Smokie II	Tollefsen	BW45	Alley	Piecuch Spies	Black Widow Smokie @ LZ Sally - Twin 20mm experiment at Phu Hiep 1/27/68 went down with short shaft problem
66-16163	2			Solkum		
66-16167						Operation Hong Kil Dong
66-16173	2			White		
66-16176	1	Coats				
	2	Tollefsen	BW45			
	Smokie III	Mains	BW25	Clements	James	
66-16199	C&C	Johnson	BW6	Lockridge	Clark	12/18/67 down for repairs - 12/19 autorotation 5/1/68 aircraft struck dike, caught fire, total loss
		Pokorski	BW48			
66-16205	2	Kinney		Merlock		Operation Hong Kil Dong - 9/11/67 hydraulic failure, landed at Cu Chi - Crashed 1/4/68 Cambodia-Newcomer WIA 11/21/67 shot down at Long Binh 12/30/67 picked up @ TNW by Pipesmoke 1/4/68 crashed in Cambodia
		Rhodes	BW44	Charlebois	Newcomer	
66-16221	1	Handel	BW26	Wolfe		"Flight to America (FTA)" Operation Hong Kil Dong - 6/6/68 Chinook dropped it for total loss 7/2/68 engine failure, autorotation, forced landing
		Beebe	BW11			
66-16222	1	Restivo	BW27	Sondey	Smith	
		Spearman	BW23	Sondey	Smith	7/30/67 TAC-E, ammo resupply, picked up 7 WIA, Sondey WIA, Smith KIA
66-16226						3/10/68 down with maintenance problems
66-16236						
66-16268	1st	Beebe	BW11	Chun	Peterson Eisert	3/10/68 down with avionics problems
66-16269	1	Hancock	BW34			
66-16464				Kennett		
66-16472						6/22/69 took 8 AK-47 hits while in the PZ
66-16520	2	Forslund	BW48	Gluesing	Dobrosky	
66-16555	M				Steiger	
66-16562					Sass	
66-16652						
66-16664						
66-16668						Smokey Baron float-lost Jesus nut on final at Cu Chi - on loan to 116 <sup>th</sup>
66-16733						
66-16801	2	Crow	BW38	Bartels	Barnes	
66-16823	2	Crawford	BW46	Alley		
		Bagby	BW26	Moore Bates	Howell Norris	
		Moak	BW49	Crouch		



Tail #	Platoon	A/C	Call Sign	Crew Chief	Door Gunner	Remarks
66-16824						
66-16833				Kennett	Freeman	
66-16843	2	Linster	BW4	Willie		"MR. LUCKY" 9/68 took 183 hits SW of LZ Sally – Willie cooked off 3000 of a 5000 round burst
66-16980		Green	BW36		Pike	Crashed at Bn Hdqts VIP pad @ Camp Eagle
					Over	
<b>C/101</b>						
66-16026						
66-16049	2			Garich		5/31/69 – Destroyed, supporting 5 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces in the DMZ out of Quang Tri
66-16176	1	Underhill				11/12/68 – M/R blade contacted a tree while hovering in LZ
		Holland	BW36	Clements	Couch	10/11/69 Autorotation, hard landing
66-16315						
66-16472						
66-16520						
66-16523	2	Hancock	BW34	Over	Galveros	
66-16652						
66-16733						
66-16779	2	Hancock	BW34	Defranco	Over	Being restored with original C/101 markings @ the Pacific Coast Air Museum at the Charles M. Schulz - Sonoma County Airport
66-16957				Shepley		
66-16980						
66-17013						
66-17026						
66-17104						
66-17112						
66-17124	1	Hill	BW16			
66-17129						
66-17131						
67-17163						
67-17169	2	Karins				
67-17236						
67-17268						
67-17374						
67-17437	1	Torre	BW 20	Astro	Moon	"Lady Jane"
		Underhill	BW22			
67-17464	1			Kennett	Harriman	
67-17474				Bailey		
				Shepley		
67-17491						
67-17495						
67-17630						
67-17655	M					
67-17681						
67-17735						
67-17801	2	Crow		Bartels	Barnes	
67-17833		Lacey		Kennett	Freeman	"BLOODY MARY 833" (from the Kingsmen Joe Kline's bird until 2/71) (Flown in New Hampshire NG early 90's)
67-18569						
67-19495						

Tail #	Platoon	A/C	Call Sign	Crew Chief	Door Gunner	Remarks
67-19519						
68-15278						
68-15347						
68-15384						
68-15461	2	Aston		Derge		
68-15523						
68-15562				Henry	Sass	
68-15621	2	Rosenon	BW47			
		Pease	BW39	Dobrosky	Over	"OLE 621"
68-15630						
68-15651						
68-15671	2	Aston				7/18/71 Extraction in classified area with CW2 Clement Custer, Laos, Aston confirmed KIA by Sgt. Richmond, body MIA
68-16054						
68-16191						
68-16290						
68-16446						
68-16469						
68-16504						
68-16539						
68-16575				Sitzwohl		
68-16585						
69-15078				Paley	Pike	
69-15144		Clark		Carlyle		
69-15155						
69-15173				White	Perry	
					Hertling	
69-15174						
69-15186						
69-15192		Tomerlin		Dobrosky	Pike	
69-15455						
69-15569	2	Dillon		Bohanick	Olson	
69-15576						
69-15630						
69-15670	2	Aston		Bohanick	Carlson	
69-15719						
69-15744						
69-15746	2	Aston		Derge		Lost in Laos 1971
69-15819						
69-15903						
70-15754						
70-15788						
70-15806						
70-15832						
70-15851						

Created and edited by Dick Detra, Geoff Handel, Jeremy Olds for the 188<sup>th</sup> History Project ©2002

# 188th Deployment Roster - 23 February 1967

MAJ Morrow, Boyd E	WO1 Holz, John F	SSGE6 Watson, Herbert R	SP4E4 Crain, Douglas L	SP4E4 Urfer, Tex A	PFCE3 Phillips, Gary L
MAJ Rungee, James L	WO1 Listion, Howard	SP6E6 Uppleger, Lawrence F	SP4E4 Emery, Jerry	SP4E4 VanLant, Wayne G	PFCE3 Reyes, Ray Jr
MAJ VanDervort, Edmund	WO1 Morton, Harry H	SGTE5 Cross, Roger E	SP4E4 Forsythe, Thomas E	SP4E4 Villalobos, Robert	PFCE3 Salvatore, Frank Jr
MAJ Wolford, Bobby E	WO1 Mullen, Michael S	SP5E5 Beal, Jackie L	SP4E4 Gano, Lester E	SP4E4 Walton, Elden L	PFCE3 Scott, Loice Jr
CPT Addy, B.W., Jr	WO1 McTaggart, John E	SP5E5 Beale, David A	SP4E4 Geving, Paul W	SP4E4 Weismann, Robert J	PFCE3 Skerbitz, Anthony
CPT Amoroso, Arnold D	WO1 Norloff, Richard W	SP5E5 Brooks, James R	SP4E4 Gillern, Terrence C	SP4E4 Weston, Archie S	PFCE3 Smalls, Joseph Jr
CPT Bailey, Ellis M	WO1 Nosworthy, Duncan	SP5E5 Childress, Thomas F	SP4E4 Gonzalez, Benjamin	SP4E4 Williams, Richard E	PFCE3 Sondey, Wm R
CPT Baker, Ronald B	WO1 Ogle, Jimmy D	SP5E5 Cooper, Carl E	SP4E4 Green, Wallace B	SP4E4 Wittner, Joseph W	PFCE3 Thomson, Donald
CPT Bradley, Glynn R	WO1 Fozdoi, Wayne E	SP5E5 Costner, James E	SP4E4 Griglio, Phillip M	SP4E4 Zito, Carl A	PFCE3 Tobey, Gary A
CPT George, Robert C	WO1 Phillips, Reed R	SP5E5 Crumb, Thomas A	SP4E4 Grindel, Robert J	PFCE3 Archambault, Kenneth	PFCE3 Tracey, John C Jr
CPT Graham, Charles M	WO1 Racey, Gerald L	SP5E5 Hopper, Grover R	SP4E4 Grindstaff, James R	PFCE3 Baldrige, Cletis M	PFCE3 VanDina, Charles
CPT Jenkins, Charles S	WO1 Rankin, Dean L	SP5E5 Ibanez, Alfredo G	SP4E4 Hodnett, Joel H	PFCE3 Bechtold, James F	PFCE3 Vollborn, Robert W
CPT Kerbl, Frank R	WO1 Restivo, Charles J	SP5E5 Koetting, Edward L Jr	SP4E4 Horton, Larry G	PFCE3 Bradford, Elijah	PFCE3 Walker, David L
CPT Seiler, Robert B	WO1 Scott, Ross R	SP5E5 Klum, Bobby D	SP4E4 Jordan, Herman Jr	PFCE3 Branch Allen W	PFCE3 Williams, Darrell E
CPT Wilson, Floyd G	WO1 Seagren, Paul R	SP5E5 Lane, Joseph R	SP4E4 Low, Joseph W	PFCE3 Brown, Arthur	PFCE3 Zambory, Donald
1LT Andrews, George T	WO1 Setzer, Robert W	SP5E5 Landwier, Wm O	SP4E4 Martin, Harold S	PFCE3 Clawson, Thomas	PFCE2 Akes, Robert E Jr
1LT Buss, Robert N	WO1 Sharp, Philip D	SP5E5 Pitman, Emery E	SP4E4 Matt, Joseph B	PFCE3 Connelly, Neil T	PFCE2 Austin, Ernest O
1LT Boschulte, James T	WO1 Simmons, Gene A	SP5E5 Warren, Harry E	SP4E4 Middleton, Herman F	PFCE3 Desisto, Edward A	PFCE2 Brantley, Gregory L
1LT DeBeia, Joseph J	WO1 Sheehan, Wm H III	SP5E5 Wright, Coy	SP4E4 Neuhart, Raymond A	PFCE3 Dillard, Kerry D	PFCE2 Davis, Gary K
1LT Glass, Allen F	WO1 Sipes, William C	SP5E5 Wright, Warren L	SP4E4 Oates, Billy D	PFCE3 Felner, Harold E	PFCE2 Dawkins, Glenn R
1LT Janes, Robert L	WO1 Sodouski, Robert	SP4E4 Alwood, Joseph W B	SP4E4 Olsen, Andrew	PFCE3 Guerrero, Hector M	PFCE2 Fore, John R
1LT Maurer, Charles J	WO1 Sondgeroth, John	SP4E4 Anderson, Steven K	SP4E4 Phillips, Larry W	PFCE3 Hodge, Lewis T	PFCE2 Franklin, Ben. A Jr
1LT Poggemeyer, James	WO1 Spearman, Johnnie	SP4E4 Arrowood, Gregory L	SP4E4 Pope, Emery J	PFCE3 Jones, Freddie L	PFCE2 Gordon, Peter E
1LT Savage, Richard T	WO1 Snook, Alfred L	SP4E4 Bassett, Thomas K	SP4E4 Riggins, Scott A	PFCE3 Kaplan, Richard I	PFCE2 Green, Oliver
1LT Sims, Herbert J	WO1 Swafford, Norman	SP4E4 Bending, Allen J	SP4E4 Smalley, Dennis R	PFCE3 Kistler, Gerald J	PFCE2 Greenstein, Stephen D
1LT Smith, Gerard J	WO1 Sween, Robert G	SP4E4 Bryan, David J	SP4E4 Smith, Douglas S	PFCE3 Knox, Arthur T	PFCE2 Jennings, Sylvester
1LT Wallace, Robert M	WO1 Theede, Elmer	SP4E4 Cabigon, Gerard L	SP4E4 Smith, Lloyd E	PFCE3 Lamb, Leroy J	PFCE2 Ketcham, Alan E
1LT Weis, Gerhard W	WO1 Thomas, David E	SP4E4 Cadreau, Richard A	SP4E4 Snyder, James M	PFCE3 Lockett, Charles E	PFCE2 Montgomery, James W
2LT Bush, James D	WO1 Wright, Bruce T	SP4E4 Carter, Robert H	SP4E4 Stanley, Porter W	PFCE3 Marrero, William R	PFCE2 Newcomer, John H
WO1 Allred, Douglas S	1SGE8 DePalm, Ramon L Sr	SP4E4 Cerhosek, Clement C Jr	SP4E4 Stocstill, George T	PFCE3 Matter, Doyle A	PFCE2 Paulsen, Dick R
WO1 Cauthen, Henry C	SSGE6 Allen, Floyd W	SP4E4 Clark, Charles W	SP4E4 Taylor, Carlton D	PFCE3 McCulley, Rex	PFCE2 Sechler, Gary L
WO1 Charity, George O	SSGE6 Cleek, Edgar L	SP4E4 Clark, Jeffrey P	SP4E4 Taylor, Ronald D	PFCE3 Miller, David H	PFCE2 Smith, Willie A
WO1 Feidler, Theodore R	SSGE6 Cooley, Jack J	SP4E4 Cooksey, Bobby H	SP4E4 Thibault, John G	PFCE3 Moody, Jimmy D	PFCE2 Williams, Roy L
WO1 Fuip, Herman G Jr	SSGE6 Sebastiano, Vicor	SP4E4 Crabbe, Wm O	SP4E4 Tucker, Edward D Jr	PFCE3 Moore, Richard L	PFCE2 Wilbourn, Aaron Jr
SFCE7 Reitzel, John R	SFCE7 Smith, Darrow O				

## 603rd Transportation Company Detachment Deployment Roster 23 February 1967

MAJ Beaulieu, Gary P	SP5 Thomas, Walter A	SP4 Hotbrook, Everette W	PFC Allen, Randall C	PFC Mudd, Nicholas D	PVT Green, Jimmie W
WO1 McFarland, Douglas C	SP4 Bardenhagen, Henry W	SP4 Mitchell, Bobby D.	PFC Beckham, Jerry L	PFC Pickford, William C	PVT Hailey, Steven K
1SGE8 Caudle, Raymon	SP4 Boudreau, Ronald A	SP4 Modt, Robert R	PFC Brock, Alan R.	PFC Reichback, Roland D	PVT Jensen, Paul A
SFCE7 Arrowood, Hubert	SP4 Bramlett, William	SP4 Shumber, James V	PFC Carr, Lowell J	PFC Sherrod, Daniel R	PVT Kennedy, William G
SSGE6 Nitchy, Frederick A	SP4 Caruthers, Larry L	SP4 Smith, Charles A.	PFC Hailey, Steven	PFC Smith, Charles A	PVT Moore, Billy W
SSGE6 Wright, James E	SP4 Craig, Barry A	SP4 Smith, Donald W	PFC Holloway, Michael K	PFC Stayton, Gary R	PVT Rodriguez, Antonio N
SP6 Randall, Jack	SP4 Day, John P	SP4 Snars, Edwin M.	PFC Hoover, Jack	PFC Taitzel, Rodney J.	PVT Quarles, James A
SP6 Regnier, Chester R	SP4 Erdman, Leroy L	SP4 Spec, Fred P	PFC Livingston, Edward M	PFC Walker, Ronald J.	PVT Rohrbach, Donald L
SP5 Blossom, Robert L	SP4 Fletcher, Merlin E	SP4 Tilton, Roy P	PFC Mace, Franklin J	PFC Wenzel, Stephen P	PVT Slate, James R
SP5 Kersey, David	SP4 Fort, Joseph J	SP4 Vendemia, David M	PFC Mitchell, Bobby D	PFC Williams, George R.	PVT Sparks, Don C
	SP4 Fry, Lawrence D. Jr.	SP4 Villaro, Benjamin	PFC Montellese, David V	PFC Wilson, James E	PVT Stepp, James L
	SP4 Heckart, Henry H	PFC Algrim, Thomas J	PFC Moore, Leslie G	PVT Blankenship, Roger E	PVT Wessner, Glen A

### Infusions

A vigorous personnel infusion program to eliminate unit rotational humps was initiated by Headquarters, United States Army, Vietnam. The goal of this program was to insure that any unit which had been in the country for one year would not lose more than 15% of its personnel during any month. Many of the original Black Widows experienced the loss of close friends being shipped out to other units after spending months together in training. It gave Commander's and Top Sergeant's the opportunity to unload malcontents and trouble makers on other units. . . plus you never knew who you were getting in return. Everyone was referred to as a "Cherry" until they were tested under fire. The "FNG's" (Fucking New Guy) tended to hang with those they arrived with. Infusions caused a constant change in the make-up of the flight crews, but it was necessary to insure unit continuity in the long run. Even though it was an opportunity for some units to rid themselves of some people, by and large the infused people quickly became part of their new units and performed their duties with courage and dedication. Listed below are the dates and units we infused with:

10 May 1967	116 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company 187 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
15 November 1967	190 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
15 December 1967	187 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
26 February 1968	3/17 CAV
11 April 1968	17 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company

### 188th Assault Helicopter Company Personnel Roster as of 30 September 1967

LTC McWhorter, James H	1LT Buss, Robert N	WO1 Hayes, Mark O	WO1 Racey, Gerald L	WO1 Snook, Alfred L	WO1 Vieglais, Alexis
MAJ Sites, Joseph A	1LT Maurer, Charles J	WO1 Kenney, Paul E Jr	WO1 Rankin, Dean L	WO1 Sodouski, Robert G	WO1 West, Eric J
CPT Amoroso, Arnold D	1LT Sperling, Richard A	CW2 Koch, William J Jr	WO1 Rhodes, Richard C	WO1 Sondgeroth, John H	WO1 Windeler, Charles C
CPT Charbonneau, Maurice	WO1 Alexander, Robert D	WO1 Liston, Howard	WO1 Sanchez, John D	WO1 Spearman, Johnnie J	WO1 Whitwick, William P
CPT Elliott, James R	WO1 Averette, Alton R	WO1 Mullen, Michael S	WO1 Seagren, Paul R	WO1 Stewart, Marc L	WO1 Wright, Bruce T
MAJ Graham, Charles M	WO1 Charity, George O	WO1 Ogle, Jimmy D	WO1 Setzer, Robert W	WO1 Sween, Robert G	CPT Arp, Emmet D
CPT Wilson, Floyd G	WO1 Donahue, James T	WO1 Phillips, Reed R	WO1 Sharp, Philip D	WO1 Talley, George E	MAJ Searcy, James W
1LT Boschulte, James T	WO1 Fulp, Herman G Jr	WO1 Pokorski, Kenneth A	WO1 Sheehan, William H	WO1 Thurston, Paul G	1LT Waters, John E
1LT Bush, James O	WO1 Handel, Geoffrey L	WO1 Prevost, Homer J Jr.	WO1 Sipes, William C		WO1 Branstorn, Douglas

**188th Assault Helicopter Company  
Personnel Roster as of 16 October 1967**

SP4 Akes, Robert E Jr	SSG Cleek, Edgar L	SP4 Gravatt, Robert D	PFC Lewis, George R	PFC Prather, Orvel W	PFC Toivonen, Richard D
SSG Allen Floyd W	SSG Cooley, Jack J	PFC Gray, Larry A	PFC Lockridge, Herbert	PFC Prillo, Thomas J	SP5 Tracey, John C Jr
PVT Alley, Wendell T Jr	SSG Cooper, Carl E	PFC Haber, Neal B	SP5 Low, Joseph	SP4 Read, David E	SP4 Treat, Henry F
SP5 Arrowood, Gregory L	SP5 Costner, James E	PVT Hanley, Mike S	SP4 Martin, Stephen J	SFC Reitzel, John R	SP4 Trueblood, James H
SP4 Austin, Ernest O	SP4 Crabbe, William O	PFC Harshaw, Dannie L	SGT Martin, Harold S	SP4 Reyes, Ray Jr	SP5 Tucker, Edward D Jr
SP5 Baldridge, Cletis M	SP4 Crain, Douglas L	SP5 Hertzler, James P	SP5 McCulley, Rex	SP5 Riggins, Scott A	SP5 Urfer, Tex A
SP5 Bassett, Thomas R	CPL Cross, Roger E	SP5 Hitzemann, Roger F	PFC McIntire, James	SP4 Robinson, Leon C	SP4 VanDina, Charles
SP4 Bell, John A	SP5 Crumb, Thomas A	SP4 Hobbs, Garry E	PVT McKennett, Patrick	SP4 Rufano, Sebastian	SP4 Varela, Ruben
SP5 Bending, Allen J	PFC Daniel, Franklin L	SP5 Hodge, Lewis T	SP4 Mechling, Douglas B	PFC Sanford, Larry J	PFC Vickroy, Michael E
SP5 Bradford, Elijah	SP5 Day, Pryor	SP4 Hosner, James	SP4 Merlock, Ronald D	SP5 Schorr, Martin L	SP4 Villalobos, Robert
SP4 Branch, Allen	SP4 De Gregory, Humbert	SP4 Howell, Leo S	SP5 Miller, David H	PVT Scribner, Donald R	SP4 Vollborn, Robert W
PFC Brantley, Gregory O	1SG DePalm, Ramon L Sr	SP5 Ibanez, Alfredo G	SP4 Moody, Stanley E	SP4 Searts, Michael D	SP4 Wachtor, Robert A
PFC Brown, Arthur	SP4 Detra, Richard A	SP4 Johnson, Jesse V	SP5 Moody, Jimmy O	SSG Sebastiano, Victor	SP4 Walker, David L Jr
SP4 Burton, Robert J	SP4 Elsert, James J	SP4 Jones, Freddie L	SP4 Newcomer, John H	SP4 Sechler, Gary L	SSG Warren, Harry E
SP5 Busby, Philip J	SGT Emery, Jerry	SP4 Jordon, Herman JR	SP4 Nicolosi, John A Jr	SP4 Skerbitz, Anthony R	SP4 Webster, Wayne
SP5 Cabigon, Gerald	PFC Fenton, Larry	SP4 Kaplan, Richard I	SP4 Nye, Edward H II	SP4 Smalley, Dennis R	SP4 Weston, Archie S
SP4 Camp, Harold E	SGT Fields, Alfred J	SP4 Ketcham, Alan	SP5 Olsen, Andrew	SFC Smith, Darrow C	PFC Williams, Leo F
SP4 Carpenter, Ronald J	SP4 Forsythe, Thomas E	SP4 Kistler, Gerald J	SP4 Palmer, Francis E	SP4 Sondey, William R	PFC Wingerd, Tim M
PFC Carter, Charles G	SP4 Fugate, Harold G	SP4 Corner, Charles P	SP5 Pausen, Dick R	SP4 Staley, Harold F	SP5 Wolf, Dennis M
PFC Castle, Joseph R	SP4 Fuller, John M	SP5 Koetting, Edward L	PFC Pierpoint, Dennis E	SP4 Steward, George R	SP4 Wooley, Daniel L
SSG Childress, Thomas F	SP4 Gale, Clifton J	SP4 Cazique, Richard S	PFC Peterson, Otto B	SP5 Stocstill, G T	SGT Wright Warren L
SP4 Christy, Larry O	SP5 Garcia, Donald E	SP4 Lagle, Alfred J	SP4 Petersen, Jack E	SP4 Suarez, Carlos E	SP5 Wright, Coy
SP4 Clark, Loran G	SP4 Geving, Paul W	SP5 Lamb, Leroy J	SP4 Pettinato, Edward R	SP4 Taylor, Carlton D	SP4 Wycoski, Richard A
SP5 Clark, Charles W	SP5 Gilmore, James A E	SSG Landwier, William O	SP5 Phillips, Larry	SP4 Thibault, John G	
PFC Clark, Martin J	SP5 Gonzalez, Benjamin	SSG Lane, Joseph R	PFC Phillips, Gary L	SP4 Thomas, William R	
SP4 Clayton, Cameron W	SP5 Goodpaster, Tanga G	SP4 LeBlanc, Addy R	SP5 Pope, Omery J		



# FNG'S

November, 1967

\*Infused from 190th AHC

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Cpt.	Henry Holzheuser	Sgt.	Mendyk, David M.	Sp/4	Steiger, James D.
1Lt.	Carl R. Eisman	Sgt.	Wyatt, James M.	Sp/4	Mendoza, Frank
WO1	Gager, Wesley C.	Sp/5	Garsand, William	PFC	* Charlebois, John
WO1	Gurica, John E.	Sp/5	Patton, Charles L.	PFC	* Cooney, Kirby C.
WO1	Jones, George	Sp/5	Waggoner, Robert	PFC	* Glenn, Roy G.
WO1	Jordan, George R.	Sp/4	* Allen, Gregory P.	PFC	* Harris, Robert A.
WO1	Mauseth, Robert L.	Sp/4	* Gardner, Gary M.	PFC	* Hartman, Bernard
WO1	Mills, James	Sp/4	* Haertner, Johnnie	PFC	* Jarzombek, George
WO1	Mudge, Robert W.	Sp/4	* Hensley, James E.	PFC	* McDirmid, Dennis
WO1	Nicholas, Van	Sp/4	* Larson, Roy L.	PFC	* Meyer, Peter W.
WO1	Nickel, Rudolf E.	Sp/4	* Mann, John W.	PFC	* Moore, John R.
WO1	Padie, Charles J.	Sp/4	* McCoy, Willie G.	PFC	* Renaudette, Ronald
WO1	Roberts, Hilmar	Sp/4	* Petty, Ronald L.	PFC	* Snyder, Rex K.
WO1	Virgne, Jeffrey E.	Sp/4	* Redix, Willie R.	PFC	Gilbam, Tarence W.
WO1	Walker, Ernest J.	Sp/4	* Schaefer, John C.	PFC	Nordenstrom, John
WO1	Wilbur, James M.	Sp/4	* Wiater, Eugene M.	PFC	Swann, John L.
WO1	Youngblood, Robert	Sp/4	Boyd, Joseph C.	Pvt.	Davis, Rodger L.
SSG	Jackson, Buddy C.	Sp/4	Gonzales, Jesus	Pvt.	McCloud, Carroll H.
SSG	Randall, Jack				

December, 1967

\* Infused from the 187th AHC

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Maj.	Johnson, Jack O.	SSG	Vaughn, James H.	Sp/4	* DiPaule, Anthony A.
Cpt.	Doht, Gerald W.	Sp/5	* Brewer, Bobbie H.	Sp/4	* Felicione, Joseph
Cpt.	Dunbar, Edward M.	Sp/5	* Hedge, Howell	Sp/4	* Mere, Vernon L.
Cpt.	Searcy, James W.	Sp/5	* McBeth, Raymond A.	Sp/4	* Parks, Robert L.
Cpt.	Smith, Harold B.	Sp/5	* Moore, Randall E.	Sp/4	* Smith, Robert M.
1Lt.	Hill, Robert Jr.	Sp/4	* Armstrong, Harold	Sp/4	Matthess, Robert
WO1	Coats, Phillip E.	Sp/4	* Bancer, George	Sp/4	Williams, Donald H.
WO1	Terrey, John D.	Sp/4	* Behy, Dennis C.	PFC	* Petersen, Lyle B.
WO1	Tollefsen, Kjell T.	Sp/4	* Brahaney, John H.	PFC	Piecuch, Ronald J.
1Sgt.	Ackley, Pearl E.	Sp/4	* Buchanan, Jack		

January, 1968

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Cpt.	Kingman, Dan C. Jr.	Sp/4	Bobo, Cecil R.	PFC	Jones, Freddie
Cpt.	Kunde, Gerald R.	Sp/4	Bryson, Daniel Y.	PFC	McFarland, John W.
Cpt.	McMillan, Thomas	Sp/4	Ditamore, Dennis	PFC	Parks, Arlie J.
1Lt.	Linster, Frank J.	Sp/4	Gravatt, Robert D.	PFC	Phillips, Orin G.
1Lt.	White, Raymond H. Jr	Sp/4	Losey, Buddy C.	PFC	Reiter, Virgil P.
CW2	Hilter, John W.	Sp/4	Munger, Larry A.	PFC	Repasy, George J.
CW2	Moore, Marion M.	Sp/4	Regelin, Robert F.	PFC	Robinson, Percy C.
WO1	Clark, Larry L.	Sp/4	Reilly, William C.	PFC	Thompson, Jesse
WO1	Cranford, Wesley E.	Sp/4	Trotter, Robert E.	PFC	Thompson, Ronald J.
WO1	Cunningham, Edward	Sp/4	Vasquez, Teofilo	PVT	Chunn, Terry L.

WO1	Gaskins, Curtis	Sp/4	Wilson, John D.		
WO1	Jerge, Gene F.	Sp/4	Yett, Herbert P.	PVT	Grummel, Thomas E.
WO1	Spradlin, Robert G.	PFC	Barton, Roland	PVT	Patrick, Charles
WO1	Stubbs, William	PFC	Coker, Hugh F.	PVT	Peterson, Jack D.
SFC	Helvey, Joe D.	PFC	Corral, Juan F.	PVT	Ramirez, Mario A.
Sp/6	Kelso, Boyd W.	PFC	Fuller, Richard J.	PVT	Thopson, Ronald J.
Sp/4	Bagwell, Marvin	PFC	Geil, Donald R.		

### February, 1968

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Cpt.	Schaibly, John W.	WO1	Holmes, Bennie J.	SSG	Model, Donald
1Lt.	Demarest, David G.	WO1	Lincourt, Wayne A.	Sp/5	Evanzia, Bernard
1Lt.	Foster, Jerry D.	WO1	Melis, Richard K.	Sp/4	Doyle, Thomas M.
CW2	* Metcalfe, Timothy	WO1	Ringer, Robert J.	Sp/4	Duran, Natividad V.
CW2	Anderson, James D.	WO1	Rudzinski, Edwin	Sp/4	Lacko, John J.
WO1	* Kloefer, Dennis	WO1	Skiles, Donald B.	Sp/4	Tuel, Kenneth R.
WO1	* McCall, John S.	WO1	Taylor, James H. III	Sp/4	Wall, Larry P.
WO1	Courchaine, Terry	WO1	Whiteley, William	Sp/4	Wilson, John D.
WO1	Hill, James L.	WO1	Woolard, Claude E.	PFC	Lonesky, Tommie C.

### March, 1968

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
WO1	Tuttle, Thomas L.	Sp/4	Burrell, Ronny D.	PFC	Miller, Joseph G.
WO1	McCrary, Patrick	Sp/4	DeCoster, Alvin	PFC	Randall, Thomas F.
SSG	Moore, Meredith C.	PFC	Carson, Scott R.	PVT	Allen, Sylvester
SSG	Sifferd, James D.	PFC	Holmes, Robert L.	PVT	Benitez, Charles R.
Sgt.	Lupar, Floyd E.	PFC	Kim, Harry	PVT	Lord, William E.
Sp/4	Briestensky, Anthony				

### April, 1968

\* infused 17th AHC

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Cpt.	Voisine, Victor K.	Sp/5	Hess, Marshall E.	PFC	Anderson, Edward
1Lt.	Pratt, Ernest B.	Sp/5	Mathias, Harold E.	PFC	Astrauckas, George
2Lt.	Murphy, William F.	Sp/4	Bates, Charles W.	PFC	Brissette, Terry F.
CW2	* Cowens, Freddie W.	Sp/4	Bristol, Timothy B.	PFC	Clark, Robert L.
CW2	* Eyanson, Charles	Sp/4	Brock, Elmer C. Jr.	PFC	Demmon, Garold L.
WO1	* Washburn, Richard	Sp/4	Browning, Robert G.	PFC	Gurganus, James M.
WO1	* Wheeler, Paul W.	Sp/4	Castillo, Adan Jr.	PFC	Ontiveros, Manuel
WO1	Doss, John F.	Sp/4	Clark, Jeffrey P.	PFC	Soucy, Michael D.
WO1	Riley, Richard S.	Sp/4	Dobson, Harry C.	PFC	Urton, William W.
WO1	Robinson, Rodger W.	Sp/4	Hanson, Lawrence III	PFC	Washington, Paul R.
WO1	Wickware, Michael S.	Sp/4	Harbaugh, David O.	PVT	Benjamin, Charles
SSG	Pete, Edward A.	Sp/4	Harriman, Richard A.	PVT	Hardison, Floyd
SSG	Reet, Harold L.	Sp/4	Norris, Fred	PVT	Main, Gary W.
Sgt.	Peek, Thomas	Sp/4	Serrano-Monche, Al.	PVT	Markkula, Mark W.
Sp/5	Carl, Gilbert	Sp/4	Smith, Leroy	PVT	Mitchell, Wayne P.
Sp/5	Ellis, Leon M.	Sp/4	Valadez, Christopher		

### May, 1968

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Maj.	Adamski, Richard	Sp/4	Hill, Willie M.	PFC	Pease, Val E.
1Lt.	Schwendeman, Ralph	Sp/4	Keller, Herman E.	PFC	Shirley, Robert
WO1	Clark, Harold A.	Sp/4	Knipe, William F.	PFC	Symington, Robert E.

WO1	Rees, John H.	Sp/4	Lausch, Perry L.	PFC	Wright, Thomas F.
SSG	Briggs, Guy A.	Sp/4	Mechkowitz, Lawren	PVT	Pepper, Gregory W.
SSG	Jones, Thomas R.	Sp/4	Slocum, Robert	PVT	Flyn, Charles J.
SSG	Randall, Jack	Sp/4	Smith, Charles W.	PVT	Murphy, Michael D.
Sp/5	Daniel, Franklin L.	Sp/4	Souza, John Jr.	PVT	Cope, Joseph H.
Sp/5	Fuller, Presley R.	Sp/4	Tisdall, Garnet R.	PVT	Cluck, Edwin H.
Sp/4	Butts, Douglas J.	PFC	Barnes, Theodore	PVT	Owens, Charles A.
Sp/4	Daugherty, Darryl	PFC	Bishop, Robert E. Jr.	PVT	Niehoff, Jerold W.
Sp/4	Doyle, Timothy E.	PFC	Foures, Alan B.	PVT	Moon, Robert E. III
Sp/4	Grey, Donald E.	PFC	Jackson, John W.	PVT	Hopkins, James R.
Sp/4	Henry, Charles E.	PFC	Laurilla, Leonard		

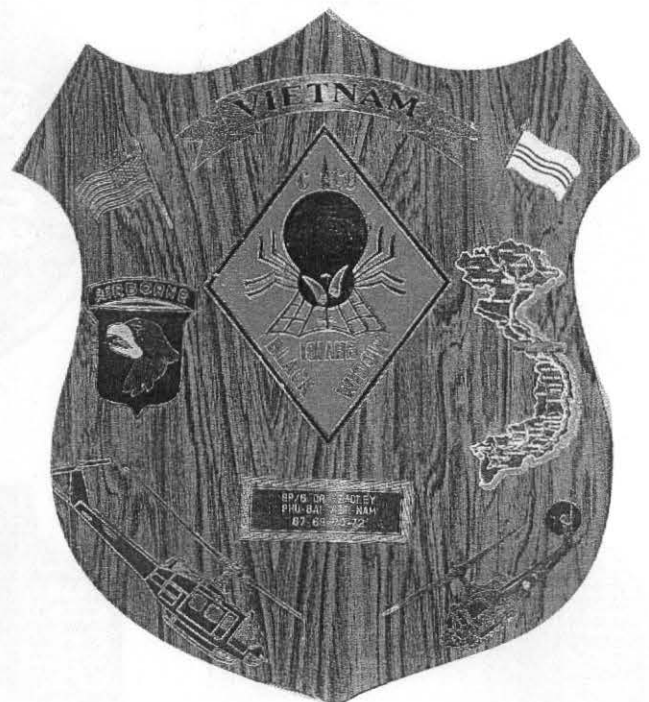
### June, 1968

Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Rank	Name
Maj.	Dreher, Hank E.	WO1	Pentilla, Erik D.	Sp/4	Tisdall, Garnet H.
Cpt.	Bagby, Fred	Sp/5	Knox, David L.	PFC	Loyd, Cleve E.
1Lt.	Faires, Robert G.	Sp/4	Bird, Arvol R.	PFC	Sparks, David L.
1Lt.	Soares, John F.	Sp/4	Breitmeyer, Floyd	PFC	Spies, Douglas M.
SFC	Cupido, Nick	Sp/4	Hall, Omer L.	PFC	Weeley, Fredrick C.
WO1	Murphy, Gilbert D.	Sp/4	Hill, Gerald S.		

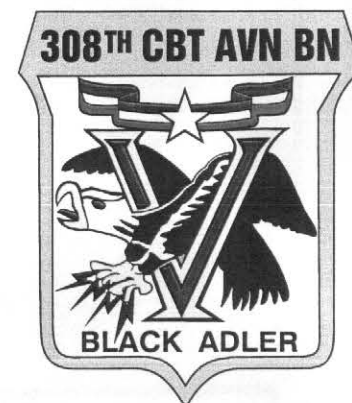
## PLAQUE COLLECTION

Pilots arriving at Dau Tieng to join the unit contributed to a slush fund to cover the costs of these Saigon made engraved service plaques. New plaques were given to pilots and in some cases enlisted men when they left the unit. Second platoon pilot, CW2 Richard "Dusty" Rhodes became our Administration Officer after we moved to LZ Sally and recalled a store room filled with boxes of these plaques, most unclaimed. While looking through the boxes, Dusty recognized the names of several pilots and enlisted men who had already transferred out, were KIA/WIA or still in the unit. The following collection includes the 269thCAB, 308thCAB, and the C/101 Black Widows.









## UNAUTHORIZED COMBAT PATCH COLLECTION

Army Aviation non-divisional units in Vietnam were organized under the direction of the First Aviation Brigade based at Long Binh. The First Aviation Brigade patch was authorized by the Department of the Army and can be worn as a combat unit patch on the uniform right sleeve by those who served in Vietnam as a member of a non-divisional Aviation unit. This is the First Aviation Brigade patch:



On May 2, 1967 the 188th Assault Helicopter Company was assigned to the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion headquartered at Cu Chi. The 269th CAB call sign (**Black Baron**) and motto (**Aim High**) were used in the 269th authorized and unauthorized patches and the motto was used by the 188th AHC when their distinctive patch was designed. The 269th CAB was under the command of the 12th Combat Aviation Group based at Long Binh which used the call sign (**Black Jack**). The patches worn by members of the 12th CAG and the 269th CAB are shown below:



The 188th AHC (call sign **Black Widow**) was organized as a standard non-division Assault Helicopter Company and was stationed at (Camp Rainier) Dau Tieng, VN, in the Michelin Rubber Plantation. Setting up GP medium tents and dealing with the mud of the heavy southwest monsoon rain, made living conditions deplorable. Things got worse....on May 17, 1967 while waiting to link up with a convoy in Long Binh, PFC Richard L. Moore was crushed to death. He was seeking shade from the heat under a parked trailer when the load shifted causing the trailer legs to collapse. The safety pin hadn't been in place and this was the units first casualty of the war. On the rainy evening of May 19, 1967 (Ho Chi Minh's Birthday) a short round from a 155mm artillery battery located on the far side of Camp Rainier, impacted through the rear entrance of bunker #4 on the company defensive perimeter. A fuse later found in the debris of what was once bunker #4 matched the lot number being used during that fire mission (World War II Stock). The explosion killed SP/4 Jerry Beckham instantly, PFC James Stepp was seriously wounded and PFC Harold E. (Buddy) Fetner died of his wounds on May 20, 1967. SP/4 William Bramlett, who was lying on top of Bunker #4 was blown 30 feet into the air and came away, unbelievably, unscathed. It kept getting worse....on June 24, 1967 at 11:02 p.m. the Viet Cong walked 100 mortar rounds up and down the 188th AHC inactive run way, also known as the "WEB". The mortar attack damaged 29 of 31 helicopters assigned, making the Black Widows non-operational within a matter of minutes. Luckily no one was killed during the mortar barrage, however, over fifty people had to be treated for shrapnel wounds. The following day, commanding officer, Major Bobby Wofford was relieved of command for not dispersing the helicopters. On June 26, 1967 LTC James McWhorter and Major Joe Sites took command of the Black Widows as CO and XO respectively. To build morale, Major Sites initiated a competition to design a pocket patch which would incorporate both our unit name and logo. Capt Floyd G. Wilson, assistant gun platoon leader designed both the company patch and spider patch and won the competition.

The unauthorized Black Widow combat patch was unique compared to other aviation companies. The various platoon and detachment designations were embroidered below the Black Widow logo. The company command and staff personnel wore the Aim High patch, which came from the 269th CAB motto. The 1st flight platoon (UH-1H Slicks), and 2nd flight platoon (UH-1H Slicks) had individual platoon patches, while the gun platoon SPIDERS (UH-1C Gunships), had two

distinctive patches. The 154th Medical Detachment used the basic 188th patch with MED embroidered on a maroon background. The 4th Signal Detachment had two patches with a distinctive black patch and a basic 188th patch with SIG embroidered on an orange background. The 603rd Transportation Company designed their own unauthorized patch to emphasize their direct maintenance support mission as the "Backbone of the 188th Aviation Company". All of the unauthorized patches were made in Saigon by the Vietnamese and were purchased as an expenditure (unauthorized) from the Company Sundry Fund.



HEADQUARTERS



SERVICE PLT



1st FLT PLT



2nd FLT PLT



GUN PLT



603 TC DET



4th SIG DET



154th MED DET



603 TC DET  
New

The TET offensive had pretty well come to an end in the III Corps Tactical Zone when the 188th AHC was alerted that a move to I Corps was about to happen. The 308th Combat Aviation Battalion under the 12th CAG was attached to the 16th Combat Aviation Group on 16 March 1968 and the 188th AHC, 17th AHC and 200 ASHC were assigned to the 308th during the end of March. The unit moved north during the last two weeks of March and soon became operational in support of the 101st Airborne Division. The 308th CAB and the 17th AHC were stationed at Camp Eagle, the 200th ASHC was at Hue Phu Bai airfield and the 188th was stationed at LZ Sally with the Second Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division.

16th CAG



308th CAB



101st Airborne Division



2nd Brigade Flag



The command relationship of the 188th AHC directly supporting the 2nd Brigade remained until 1 July 1968 when the 308th CAB and all of its assigned units were deactivated. The 308th CAB became the 159th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion and took over all CH-47 helicopter support of the 101st Airborne Division. On that same day, while under the Command of LTC Paul B. Snyder, the 101st Aviation Battalion was redesignated as the 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion. On 20 July 1968, the 17th and 188th Assault Helicopter Companies were assigned and redesignated as B and C Companies respectively. The former B Company of the 101st Aviation Battalion was redesignated the 163rd General Support Company and reassigned to the 160th Combat Aviation Group. The gunship platoons from the Comancheros (A/101), Kingsmen (B/101) and the Black Widows (C/101) were reassigned to the newly formed Delta (Aerial Weapons) Company known as Hawk.

Source: Operation Report of the 101st AHB for the period ending 31 July 1968.

Contributors:

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. John Gurica, Aim High medal emblem | 6. Lyle Parker MD, 154th MED DET       |
| 2. Ray Scribner, Service platoon      | 7. Neil Connelly, Black 4th SIG DET    |
| 3. Bob Crow, 188th Spiders            | 8. Greg Pepper, 188th SIG DET          |
| 4. Charlie Maurer, 2nd platoon        | 9. Jim Wilson, 603rd TC DET            |
| 5. Dick Detra, Spiders                | 10. Jack Johnson, CO 188th AHC         |
|                                       | 11. Richard Sperling, 1st platoon      |
|                                       | 12. Ben Taylor, 188th AHC/603rd TC DET |
|                                       | 13. Gary Beaulieu, CO 603rd TC DET     |

## NOSE AND DOOR ART

The 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company (AHC), a non-divisional aviation company, served under the 1st Aviation Brigade, giving Army aviation a command of its own. Aviators throughout history have had names and distinctive logos painted some where on their aircraft and this tradition flourished within the confines of the 1st Aviation Brigade, making it a great command to serve under. Units under the 1st Aviation Brigade had more freedom of action compared to regular Army divisions. While assigned to Vietnam the 188<sup>th</sup> had the opportunity to serve under Operational Control (OPCON) of the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> 9<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, 199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade, 82<sup>nd</sup>, 173<sup>rd</sup>, and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions, Navy Seal Team One, 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Divisions, 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (B-34, B-36, A-101 and A-322) and MACV-SOG/CCN (Command and Control North). Free World forces included the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force and the White Horse and Tiger Divisions of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Vietnamese units included The Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions and the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). Last but not least were the FREE CAMBODIAN mercenaries working with B-36. Working under the operational control of a division allowed the division to dictate only what mission would be assigned to us. All other areas of command fell under the chain of command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade and its subordinate combat aviation battalions.

The original Black Widow nose art design was painted on one of the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon hueys and was immediately scratched after getting a thumbs down by the flight crews. Assistant Spider gun platoon leader, Captain Floyd Wilson, designed the second nose art. Company artist, Gary Tobey, designed stencils to be used on all the slicks (UH-1H). After the June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1967 (one hundred round) mortar attack that damaged 29 of 31 hueys, Gary designed the final nose art. When LTC James Merryman got wind of an artist in the 188<sup>th</sup>...he was soon transferred to the 269<sup>th</sup> Headquarters. The only Spider nose art was hand painted by door gunner SP/4 Dick "Cherry Boy" Detra, on a UH-1C gunship, tail # 66-15179...better known in the company as "SATISFACTION". Unfortunately, there was never a stencil made to paint logos on the other gunships.

The flight crews always got a thumbs-up or a good word about the artwork or names from the grunts before pulling pitch on another mission. The young pilots, crew chiefs and the door gunners took great pride in the names painted on the doors of their assigned hueys. Each crew was committed to keeping their huey in top-notch condition. FORNICATOR 44 was one of the company favorites that didn't last long because it was a little radical for the times.

There were numerous times when our slick drivers, flying single ship Ash and Trash missions, would be questioned about the aircraft markings. If someone really took issue, the pilots generally suffered their ass-chewing quietly and went about their business of providing the support needed by the grunts with dignity and dedication. As you will see...a number of the names used were actually hit songs from 1967. Missing from this collection are photos of BLACK SHEEP, CRIMSON AND CLOVER, COWBOY JOE, FORNICATOR 44, IRON BUTTERFLY, SUSIE-Q, and SWEET THANG.



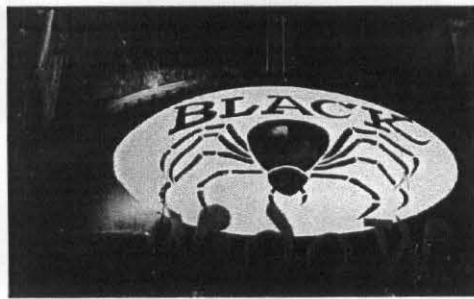
Late in 1968, the Black Widows got the mission to fly escort cover for a 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division field grade officer. When the slick arrived at Camp Eagle and the officer came out to board his own huey, he noticed the name painted on the door of the Black Widow slick. The name LOVE, along with a few painted flowers, caught his attention...that he related to San Francisco's "Flower Children". Needless to say the officer did not have a sense of humor and failed to see the importance of our door art and the morale factor not only for our flight crews, but also for the grunts that we supported in northern I Corps. The result was that since we had been redesignated as Charlie Company, 101st Aviation Battalion and attached to the 101<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division, he had the authority to force the removal of all unauthorized markings on 101<sup>st</sup> aircraft. It was truly a SAD day for all the division flight crews; when the order came down to remove all nose and door art.

While assigned to the 269<sup>th</sup> the 188<sup>th</sup> markings were a white circle with a red bullseye. When we became attached to the 308<sup>th</sup> the unit markings were a red and white diamond configuration. These markings were located on both sides of the tail boom and the top surface of the port and starboard tailplanes. Color markings for the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon was yellow, 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon was white and the Spider gun platoon was red. These color markings were painted on the cockpit step, the outside vertical edge of the port and starboard tailplane and on the upper vertical surface of the tail pylon. C/101 crews also painted the last three numbers on the tail pylon number and the stinger with their platoon color.



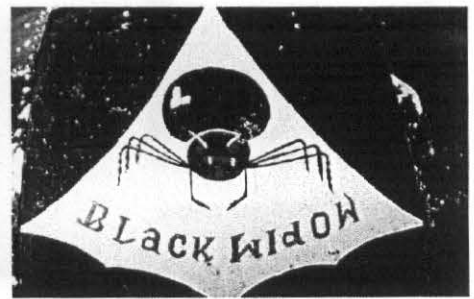
Larry Gray Collection

1st Nose Art  
Tail #66-16113 - First Black Widow nose art.  
Photo taken after crash in Cambodia  
Operation Rapid Fire V.



Hank Bardenhagen Collection

Second Black Widow nose art.



Hank Bardenhagen Collection

Third Black Widow nose art.  
This came about after the June 24th, 1967  
mortar attack that damaged 29 out of  
31 helicopters.



Larry Gray Collection

First Black Widow 6 nose art.



Hank Dreher Collection

Tail #66-16199 C&C Ship  
Photo of our operations officer Captain Dan  
Kingman at LZ Sally - KIA on second tour.



Ron Merlock Collection

Crew Chief Ron Merlock at The Web -  
Dau Tieng - checking shrapnel damage  
after June 24th mortar attack.



Hank Dreher Collection

For some reason the Kingsmen repaired one of our choppers and left this note on the battery access panel.



Ron Merlock Collection

Tail #66-16119 Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds (LSD) - Everybody's favorite 2nd platoon leader First Lieutenant Charlie Maurer AC, SP4 Ron Merlock, and SP4 Jim Trueblood, both crew chiefs on this bird. Door Gunner SP4 Dick Detra hand painted nose and door art. Notice white 2nd platoon markings and the distinctive bulls-eye logo of the 269th CAB. The name was derived from the hit song, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds", on the SGT Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album, written by the Beatles, in 1967.



Dick Detra Collection

Tail #66-16119 LSD - Full front view at The Web - Dau Tieng - one-of-a-kind nose art - No other hueys in the unit had this nose art.



Kjell Tollefsen Collection

Tail #66-16155 Black Widow Smokie nose art.



John Spillane Collection

"THE OLD MANS" bird. BLACK BARON 6



Ron Merlock Collection

Alfred E. Newman's favorite - Friday's Child - 1st platoon



The CRS Collection

Tail #66-16122 - RAGIN CAJUN - 2nd platoon AC George Tally, crew chief Tim Wingerd, and door gunner Robert Matthes. Hit by RPG and automatic weapons fire in LZ Rosie during operation Rapid Fire V. Was flown by AC George Jones and pilot Gerald Doht during this mission. Doht and Wingerd were evacuated back to the States due to the extent of their injuries. The huey was sling-loaded back to The Web - Dau Tieng.



Ted Alley Collection

Tail #66-16155 Good 'ole Black Widow Smokie - AC Kjell "Troll" Tollefsen, crew chief Ted Alley, and door gunner Ron Piecuch, 2nd platoon huey taken at LZ Sally Spring 1968



Kjell Tollefsen Collection

Tail #66-16131 Summer Wine, 2nd platoon huey. AC George Jones and crew chief John Moore. Huey named after Nancy Sinatra's 1967 hit tune.



John Soares Collection

Number 10 - Taken at LZ Sally just before the names were to be taken off of the hueys, September '68



Joe Matt Collection

Wild Bill - Hard landing?



Max Beebe Collection

Tail #66-16089 Black Baron 6 - LTC Jim Merryman C&C ship. UH-1H on loan from the 188th. 1st LT. Max Beebe standing next to the door. Notice Maltese Cross painted on the door.



Joe Sites Collection

Anna B. - At The Web - Dau Tieng.



Joe Sites Collection

Tail #66-16113 Polish Power - C&C ship, summer of '67 at 06 runway - Dau Tieng.



Jimmy Ogle Collection

Tail #66-16113 Polish Power door art Black Widow 19



John Soares Collection

The O.D. Streak - At LZ Sally



Ted Alley Collection

LOVE - This is the huey that was spotted by the 101st field grade officer that resulted in the removal of all nose and door art - fall '68.



Frank Linster Collection

Tail #66-16843 MR. LUCKY 2nd platoon huey  
AC Cpt. Frank Linster & crew chief Mike Willie  
getting ready for Chieu Hoi mission - 12 hours  
of flying in circles at 60 knots at 500 ft. After  
being cherry for 10 mo. in country, Frank named  
his huey "Mr. Lucky". In August of '68, that  
all changed while flying in the Ashau Valley,  
where they got the shit shot out of them.



John Soares Collection

Spider gunship ERADICATOR  
gun platoon leader John Soares 3rd from  
the left. Photo taken at LZ Sally  
late in '68.



Max Beebe Collection

Tail #66-16221 2nd platoon ship FTA  
"Flight to America" (AKA F\_\_ The Army)  
standing next to the ship is 1st Lt. Max  
Beebe. Huey destroyed in June of '68.  
AC was Geoff Handel.



Jimmy Ogle Collection

Frencky's Folly - 1967.



Dick Detra Collection

Tail #66-15179 Spider gunship SATISFACTION -  
AC CW1 Joe Walker, crew chief on left  
SP5 Greg "ANIMAL" Allen, and door gunner  
on right SP4 Dick "Cherry Boy" Detra. Spider  
nose art and door art hand painted by Cherry Boy  
. XM21 minigun system, LZ Sally May '68.



Dick Detra Collection

Tail #66-15179 SATISFACTION -named  
after the hit tune by the Rolling Stones, '67 -  
front view of Spider nose art hand painted  
by Cherry Boy. Only spider gunship with  
nose art, May '68, LZ Sally.



John Soares Collection

'Ole 179 SATISFACTION - gun platoon  
1st Lt. John Soares took over  
after CW2 Joe Walker DEROS'd.  
LZ Sally August '68.



John Soares Collection

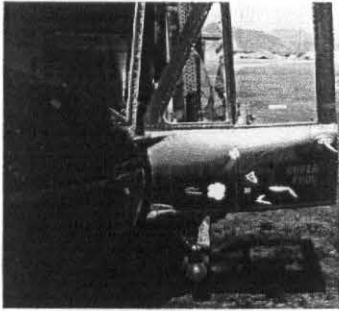
'Close up of good 'ole 179  
SATISFACTION nose art.



Jimmy Ogle Collection

'ASASSINS' INC. - Spider gun platoon '67.





John Soares Collection

SUPER FROG - Spider gun platoon  
LZ Sally September '68.



Jimmy Ogle Collection

SUPER SANDPIPER Black Widow 12 -  
At The Web - Dau Tieng '67.



Dick Detra Collection

PSYCO - Spider gun platoon artwork done  
by Cherry Boy. Notice the 308th battalion  
diamond markings on the tail boom. Red &  
white diamond markings signified the 188th.  
LZ Sally, May '68



John Soares Collection

CLIMAX - Spider gunship - Hog at LZ Sally  
August '68. Door art painted by Dick Detra.  
Late '68 destroyed during typhoon.



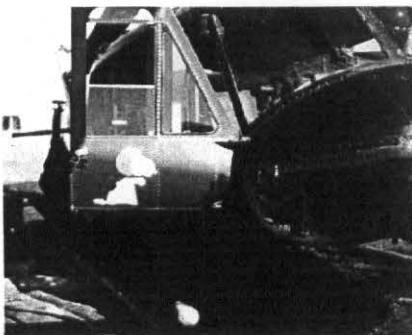
Bob Moon Collection

LADY JANE - 1st platoon slick at  
LZ Sally - October 1968



John Soares Collection

SUDDEN DEATH - Spider gunship,  
September '68 at LZ Sally.



John Soares Collection

Charles Schultz classic "SNOOPY" found  
it's way into the 2nd platoon at LZ Sally.



Dick Detra Collection

COLD SWEAT - Spider gunship painted by  
Dick Detra at LZ Sally in May '68 - named  
after the hit tune by James Brown.



Greg Pepper Collection

MR. LONELY - 1st platoon huey painted  
by Greg Pepper, who is holding the paintbrush,  
at LZ Sally, September '68.



Joe Matt Collection

"Hoocher" - crew chief Joe Matt at  
The Web - Dau Tieng, in June '67.



Kjell Tollefsen Collection

TROLL - 2nd platoon huey -  
AC Kjell Tollefsen



Dick Detra Collection

Spider nose art drawn by Dick Detra up  
at LZ Sally in May '68. Unfortunately it  
never made it past the drawing board.



Dave Miller Collection

This work, drawn by Dave Miller,  
was submitted for the nose art  
competition at Dau Tieng  
in June of '67.



Greg Pepper Collection

Art work painted for Murray Parker  
and hung in the Officer's Club  
at Camp Eagle in '69.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

Tail #66-16089 WICKED WAHINE  
Black Baron 6 -Lt. Col. James  
Merryman's C&C ship. The chopper  
was named after a nickname he gave  
to his wife while on R&R in Hawaii,  
Photo taken in '67 at Cu Chi.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

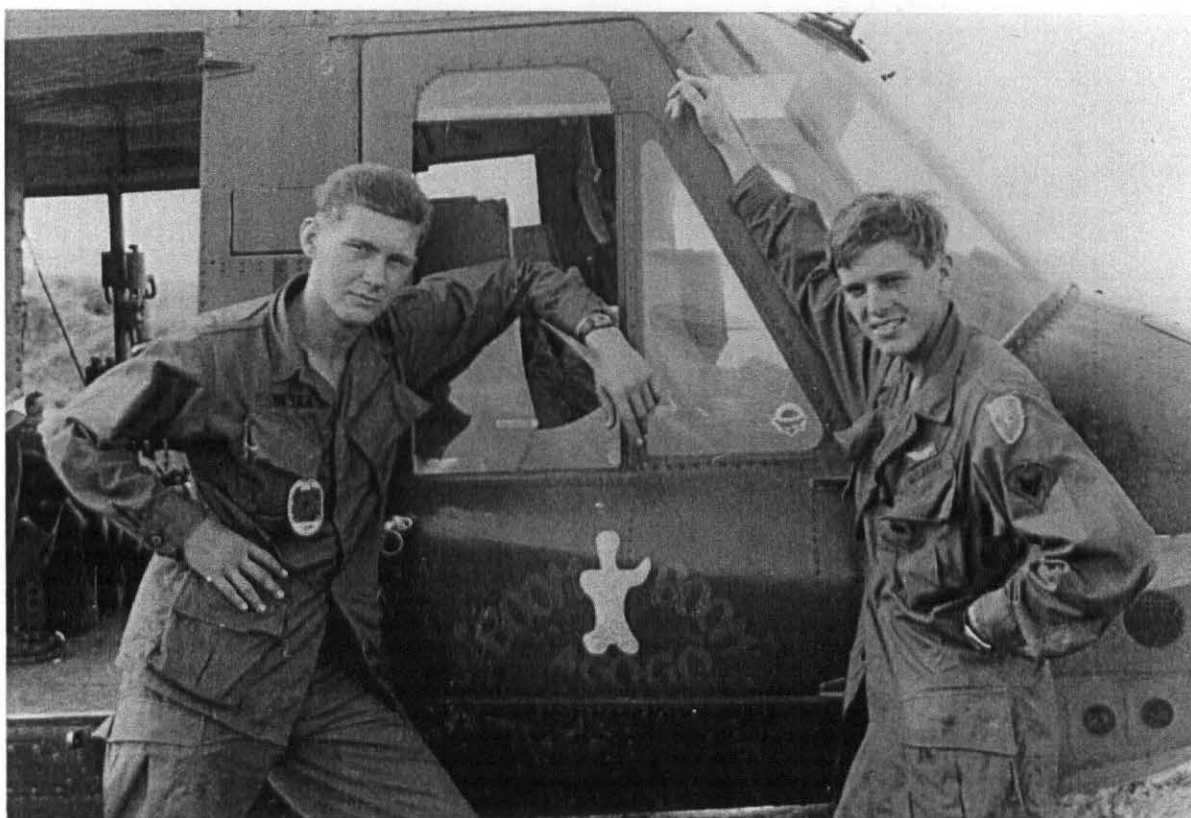
Hornet 6 C&C huey refueling at Cu Chi. Notice  
the Maltese Cross within the 116th AHC  
Hornet nose art, our sister company.





Doug Smith Collection

12th CAB Commanders C & C Helicopter - 1967



Dick Detra Collection

#16119 BOOM BOOM AGO-GO

2nd Platoon slick Oct 1967

On the left door gunner SP4 Dick "Cherry Boy" Detra, on the right Crew Chief SP4 Jim "Blood" Trueblood

# 188TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY



"GUNS UP"  
DAU TIENG / LZ SALLY '67 - '68

***BEATS WALKIN'***

YOUR RIDE, COMPLIMENTS OF  
~THE~

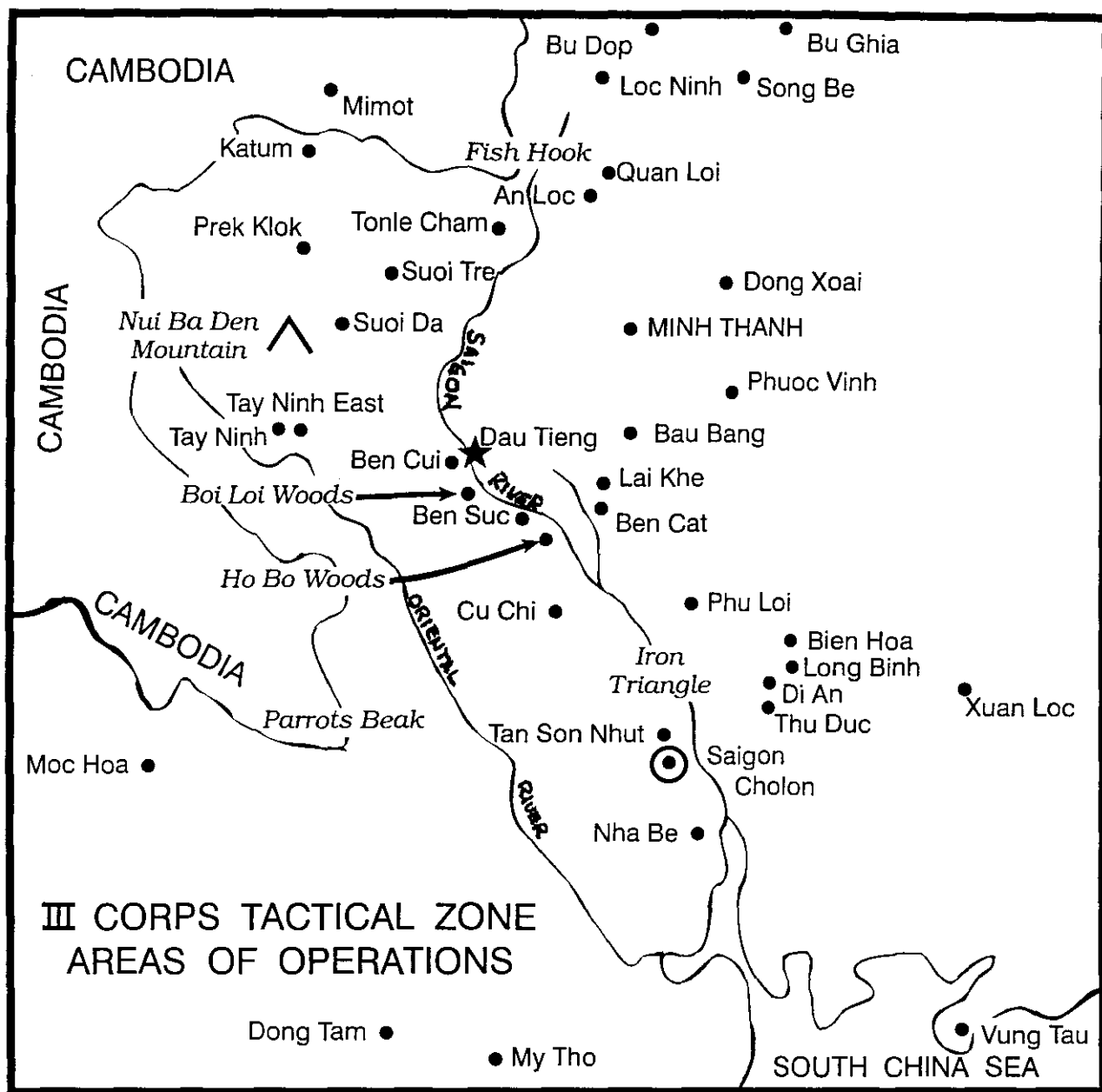
**“Black Widows”**

188th ASLT. HEL. CO.  
DAU TIENG, VIETNAM

This is a reproduction done by Bob Moon, 1st platoon gunner, of a sign originally created by an unknown artist at Dau Tieng sometime in 1967-68. The “Dau Tieng” sign hung in the cargo bay of either a 1st or 2nd platoon “slick”

# *DAU TIENG VIETNAM 1967*





## STATIONS

DAU TIENG (translation in Vietnamese WELL KNOWN TREE)

CAMP RAINIER was named after Mt. Rainier in Washington State

Coordinates: XT491472

TRI TAM DISTRICT (pronounced TREE TOM) Population: 22,946

BINH DUONG PROVINCE (pronounced BIN ZONG) Population: 250,422

The Viet Cong referred to this province as THU DAU MOT or MILITARY REGION 1 (MR-1)

26 APRIL 1967 - 9 MARCH 1968

AREA OF OPERATION, WESTERN III CORPS / CAMBODIAN BORDER





## "Camp Rainier"

Dau Tieng, South Vietnam 1967-1968

Home of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, The Funky Fourth,  
until August 1, 1967 when it was redesignated as the  
3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, The Electric Strawberry.

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- A Southwest Main Gate
- B Gate for the indigenous Vietnamese workers from Dau Tieng
- C Southeast Main Gate
- D North Main Gate
- ✓ Viet Cong tunnels being dug into the base camp. These tunnels were used later in the conflict to gain access to the interior of the camp.
- 1. 3rd Brigade Headquarters (HQ) and Tactical Operations Center (TOC)
- 2. Michelin Villa with swimming pool (used by French managers when they flew up from Saigon)
- 3. Officers swimming pool
- 4. 2/12 "White Warriors" HQ and TOC
- 5. Main swimming pool and snack bar
- 6. 3rd Brigade Hospital, D Company 25th Medical Battalion
- 7. 188th Assault Helicopter Company "Black Widows" HQ and TOC
- 8. 188th Motor Pool
- 9. 188th helicopter revetment area also known as "THE WEB" - JP4, Pol and ammo rearm point
- 10. 188th, 603d and 4th Signal Detachment maintenance area
- 11. 25th Aviation hanger, OH21 and OH23
- 12. PX and Chapel
- 13. 3/22 "Regulars" HQ and TOC
- 14. 1/27 Artillery HQ and TOC (155mm Howitzer), 44th Scout Dog Platoon
- 15. 2/22 "Triple Deuce" HQ and TOC
- 16. Air traffic control-tower, counter mortar standby and the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron (OV-10) "Bronco's"
- 17. Main Runway 26, C-130, C-123 and C7A fixed wing only

- 18. 25th Supply and Transport
- 19. 2/77 Artillery HQ and TOC, 155mm Howitzer, direct support
- 20. Division artillery, 175mm and 8" Howitzer
- 21. C Battery 1/27 Field Artillery, 155mm Howitzer
- 22. 3rd Platoon, 25th MP Company
- 23. Laterite pit and dump - the Vietnamese would fight over the garbage we dumped, pimps would sell happy smoke and whores, plus a favorite spot for V.C. snipers.
- 24. Small arms familiarization area
- 25. AP Non village, check point (off limits)
- 26. Dau Tieng village, located on the Saigon River, was off limits and controlled at night by the Viet Cong.
- 27. Michelin Latex factory for processing of rubber
- 28. Michelin Rubber Plantation, 32 Hamlets
- 29. Main Road around the base camp, during daylight hours you could buy happy smoke and whores all along this road.
- 30. 603d Transportation Detachment, 154th Medical Detachment and 4th Signal Detachment

### LOCATION UNKNOWN

C Company 588th Engineers  
Pacific Architects and Engineers (PA and E) - Korean civilians hired to maintain power and lights for the entire base camp.  
Troop C 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry  
725th Maintenance  
5/2 Artillery, 40mm Duster's and Quad 50's  
7/11 Artillery, "On Time", 105mm Howitzer  
Delta Company, 65th Engineers  
587th Signal Battalion: Mars Station



# DAU TIENG BASE CAMP



Joe Staulkuppe Collection

**188th MAINT AREA (THE WEB) UPPER RIGHT CENTER OF PICTURE. BILLITING AREA CENTER OF PICTURE BEYOND RUNWAY.**



Joe Staulkuppe Collection

**3rd BDE AREA. GENERALLY NORTH END OF DAU TIENG BASE CAMP**



Dick Detra Collection

**DENNIS SIGLER CO C 3/22, 3RD BDE 4TH INF DIV.  
2ND PLATOON ARTIST/PAINTER MARCH 1967**



Herb Burdett, Correspondent 25th Inf Div.

**3RD BDE VIP PAD**



Ed Atlee Collection

**MICHELIN RUBBER LATEX PLANT ON THE SAGION RIVER, DAU TIENG.  
NUI BA DEN IN BACKGROUND LOOKING WEST TOWARD TAY NINH AND CAMBODIA**





consecutive days. In December 1967 the 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment flight surgeon, chewed out the Operations Officer for flying the pilots over their maximum. The 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade was very consistent about not allowing pilots to fly over their individual hours. At that time, many of the pilots were close to maximum hours. On at least one occasion the 188<sup>th</sup> was ordered to stand down because of the above restrictions. The 188<sup>th</sup> was one of the few Assault Helicopter Company's to fly in all four Corps AO's and over the fence into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam while working Special Operations with the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces, CCN and SOG. Because of the diverse terrain features of Vietnam, tactics had to be changed from one Corps AO to the next. Classified missions over the fence were always the most dangerous and strictly voluntary.

Crew Chiefs (military MOS, 67N20) were the unsung heroes in the Black Widows and Spiders. Before first light they were always the first to arrive at their assigned helicopter and after flying long hours in combat, were the last to leave in the evenings. These guys worked long hours ...keeping their helicopter in flyable condition, no matter what it took. If they couldn't get spare parts through normal Army channels, they would not hesitate to scrounge them off any red-X'd hanger queen (AV8ER slang for any huey parked in the maintenance area for long periods of time awaiting parts). If a crew chief wasn't comfortable with his assigned door gunner, he made sure that his platoon sergeant assigned a different door gunner.

Except for several 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne troops from Ft. Campbell, the original door gunners were volunteers from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In May of 1967, prior to the Black Widows becoming operational, airborne units were taking heavy casualties and replacements were needed to fill their depleted ranks. A MACV directive ordered airborne rated personnel, flying as door gunners, who chose not to drop their airborne status, to pack their bags. On May 27, 1967, Sgt. William Doctor Jr., Sp/4 Wallace B. Green, Sp/4 Phillip M. Griglio, Sp/4 Johnny A. Magdaleno, Sp/4 James M. Snyder, Sp/4 Richard E. Williams, PFC Glenn R. Dawkins, PFC Hector M. Guerrero and PFC Arthur T. Knox were transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. The 188<sup>th</sup> needed Infantry replacements that had qualified with the door gunner's primary weapon, the M60 machine gun. To fill those empty slots the XO, Major James Rungee, approached our next-door neighbors, the 2/12 Infantry, "White Warriors" and asked for volunteers to fly as door gunners with the 188<sup>th</sup>. You can imagine how many of the grunts put in for that transfer...it was a grunts dream to get out of the jungle. Because of personnel shortages in the 2/12, the Commander had no choice but to turn the transfer requests down. So, during the first part of June, Major Rungee requested, through the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB, Infantry replacements from the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Center in Long Binh.

After graduating from Fort Polk's "TIGER LAND, Birthplace of the Combat Infantryman for Vietnam", the Vietnam bound grunts, with 8 weeks of basic and 8 weeks of Infantry training, were given a thirty-day leave before reporting to the Oakland Army Depot on June 14, 1967. One particular group of 45 grunts, were bused to Travis Air Force Base and flown to Bien Hoa, Vietnam on the 15<sup>th</sup> and then driven by bus to the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Center, where they waited to be assigned to one of the Infantry Divisions. As luck would have it, Major Rungee's request arrived the same day as the group. At the morning formation on the 16<sup>th</sup>, PFC's Ronald J. Carpenter, Richard A. Detra, James J. Eisert, Clifton J. Gale, Larry A. Gray, Mike S. Hanley, Leo S. Howell, Herbert K. Lockridge, Steven J. Martin and Dennis E. Pierpoint were assigned to the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company. Camp Rainier, located in the "HOT" Michelin Rubber Plantation, was a small isolated base camp, and home to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The VC controlled village of Dau Tieng, situated alongside the Saigon River, was off limits to all US Army personnel. The village was a mere stones throw away from the 188<sup>th</sup> Company area. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, this very happy group of grunts were flown by an Air Force C-130, 40 miles NW of Saigon, to Camp Rainier. They reported in to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Ray DePalm, who welcomed them to the 188<sup>th</sup> and then assigned them to the Security platoon. Top informed them that there wouldn't be any formations on the road, out in front of the company area, because of the danger of sniper fire from the village. These FNG's pulled guard duty from 6:00 PM till 6:00 AM. On their days off they spent time lounging at the French built Olympic size swimming pool, (with a painted playboy bunny on the bottom) which had recently been refurbished by the 2/12 Infantry. On July 11, 1967 the group was given flight physicals and cleared to fly as aerial gunners. Their 11B10 MOS was changed to 11B1F. When they made Sp/4 the second number changed to 11B2F and so on as you gained rank. Eisert, Gray, Hanley, Martin and Pierpoint were assigned to 1<sup>st</sup> platoon and Carpenter, Detra, Gale, Howell and Lockridge to 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon. They would learn their new trade during airmobile operations..."ON THE JOB TRAINING UNDER ENEMY FIRE"...what a deal!

Of the remaining 35 Infantry replacements, some were assigned to other Aviation units in the area and the rest were assigned to the 2/28 Infantry "Black Lions" of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (IRON) Brigade, Big Red One, at Lai Khe. The battle of Ong Thanh (12 miles NW of Lai Khe) began on the morning of October 17, 1967, when the 188<sup>th</sup> Company was ambushed, while walking point by a reinforced battalion of the 271<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. When the smoke had cleared, the 271<sup>st</sup> had 163 KIA and the 2/28<sup>th</sup> 52 KIA, 72 WIA and 2 MIA. The next morning as a 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon Black Widow slick ferried the dead back to Lai Khe...the wind blew the poncho's open...exposing the faces of the young dead. Sp/4 Dick

Detra, flying door gunner, was beset with emotion after recognizing some of the faces as his training buddies from Fort Lewis and Fort Polk...it took most of the morning to get the job done.

The door gunners had one of the most important jobs in the AV8ERS, making sure that the two M60 machine guns were functioning and ready to ROCK and ROLL...when needed. The M60 machine gun was the best weapon in the Army...ask any door gunner or crew chief, who depended on that weapon to cover his ass and the crew while engaging the enemy during a fire fight. Distant targets could be engaged with a heavy volume of controlled and accurate fire, beyond the capability of individual weapons. It was dependable as long as the door gunner kept it clean and well maintained after each days use. The most common problem with the M60 was failure of the operating rod drive spring, which weakened after continuous firing. Runaway gun was the result of a broken or worn sear, sear notch or operating rod. Cook offs were extremely dangerous, when after continuous firing the barrel over heats causing a round to explode in the breach, shrapnel from the exploding round could kill, wound or blind. On gun runs the Spider door gunner and crew chief usually fired 1,000 to 1,500 hundred rounds. Crew chiefs, Sp/5 Tom Bartleson Sp/5 James Parrish and SP/5 Jesse Johnson, all experienced the trauma of cook offs.

The M60 machine gun, with a cyclic rate of 550 rounds per minute, was 43 ½ inches long, weighed 23 pounds and had a maximum effective range of 3,300 feet. It was an air-cooled, belt fed, gas operated automatic weapon, which had to be cocked and fired from the open bolt position as the 7.62mm ammunition is fed into the machine gun by a disintegrating split-link belt. The round consisted of a projectile, cartridge casing, the propellant powder, and the primer. The NATO cartridge came in all flavors, orange tipped tracer (every 5<sup>th</sup> round was orange), black tipped armor piercing, aluminum tipped armor piercing incendiary, green tipped piggy back (2 projectiles) and everyone's favorite, orange tipped solid tracer (every round) ammunition. The gunners used solid tracer ammo when available, because it made it easier to set enemy structures on fire. When fire was received, the gunner didn't need to aim the weapon...just walk the tracers into the target. When it was time to remove that glowing, red-hot barrel, the extra issued barrel and asbestos glove came in real handy. The manual said to switch barrels after 1 minute of fire...maybe they should have been there with us, cause no one stopped firing, during an enemy engagement, until the weapon ran out of ammo or malfunctioned. The slick M60 was fired from a fixed mount configured with a butterfly trigger set-up on the butt end of the weapon, which restricted the crew chief and door gunners range of fire. The fixed mount M60 came with a standard 500 round metal ammo box, with a flex feed chute that ran from the box and was attached to the weapon, with a spent cartridge bag. The Black Widows always operated in enemy controlled areas and needed as much ammo as they could carry, so they removed the ammo box, flex feed and cartridge bag. Without the flex feed, the linked ammo would bind and cause the M60 to stop firing. The door gunners improvised by attaching a C-ration ham and lima bean can to the flex feed clip on the M60...it worked beautifully. Each slick crew chief and door gunner used a wooden artillery round box to hold up to 2,000 rounds while the Spider crew chiefs and door gunners carried at least 3,000 rounds per weapon. To make the M60 lighter, the Spider door gunners removed the never used bi-pod leg and replaced the butt plate (which had a hinged shoulder rest) with a custom metal cap. An elastic bungee cord, secured to the top of the cargo bay, was attached to the M60 giving the Spider crew chief and door gunner freedom of movement while engaging targets on the ground. Crew chiefs and door gunners wore a body harness called a "Monkey Strap" that they hooked into one of the O-ring hard points inside the huey...in case they were wounded and blown out of the huey. Pilots, crew chiefs and door gunners wore bulletproof vests called "Chicken Plates"...these vests saved a lot of lives. The "Family Jewels" played a major role in how the "Guys in Back"(GIB...AV8ER pilot slang for the crew chief and door gunner) utilized their personal chicken plate. Because most enemy fire came up through the floor, the back plate was removed from the chicken plate and secured under the seat or sat on. Several crew chiefs and door gunners in the 188th were wounded in the butt during operations. When they returned to the company, their platoon buddies would always joke to them about, "getting shot in the ass!"

When it was time to refuel and the unit we were supporting was in contact...time was of the essence. The door gunners refueled "HOT". Which meant pumping hundreds of gallons of highly flammable JP-4, into the fuel tank with the engine running. This maneuver was dangerous because the engine exhaust temperature was 600 degrees. Gunships were always given first priority at refueling and rearming points.

The pilot seats had armor plating on the sides and back but left them exposed and sitting targets from head-on shots. Their only issued weapon was a 38 caliber Smith and Wesson pistol, the crew chiefs and door gunners were issued an M-16 and an M60 machine gun. Since the Black Widows had an abundance of M60's and spare parts, it was never a problem getting captured AK-47's and other goodies from the grunts and Special Forces units we supported. In the way of personal weapons, the AV8ERS carried as much firepower as they could, just in case they went down and were on their own, in enemy controlled areas. Being killed, wounded, captured by the enemy, pinned under a downed huey or to "CRASH AND BURN" were the realities and fears of flying.

Boom mikes attached to the flight helmet and a push to talk button made it easy for the GIB and the pilots to communicate, keeping each other informed as to being clear to crank, clear left or right, clear up or down, or back, the

direction of incoming fire, targets, trees, stumps or any other obstacles. 12 o'clock was straight ahead, 6 o'clock was your tail, 9 o'clock was the left flank and 3 o'clock was the right flank. Visually, the pilots were limited to the 3 to 9 o'clock position. During insertions and extractions, the entire crew was exposed targets. The crew chief covered the left flank while the door gunner covered the right flank of the helicopter, ready to return any incoming enemy fire. The GIB had to be very observant while relaying tactical information to the pilots.

After shut down, the door gunner usually secured the 48 foot main rotor blade, with a metal hook attached rope used as a tie down to the tail boom stinger. Other responsibilities included helping the crew chief keep the helicopter clean, washed, waxed...usually with JP-4, oil or wax. Making sure the crew had a case of C-rations (12 meals) for the day. Making sure you had plenty of yellow, green, purple and red M-18 smoke grenades. Red smoke was always used to mark the location of enemy fire. During missions, when one of the GIB got a confirmed kill, they would secure a red smoke grenade to the skid, pull the pin and then the flight of slicks or gunships would fly over the company area...trailing smoke. Letting our support guys on the ground know which helicopter had made the kills.

Saving the life of a wounded soldier, who would surely bleed to death if left on the ground, was a strong motivator for the 188<sup>th</sup> crews. They did not hesitate in responding to a ground commander's plea for help. From June 15, 1967 through January 31, 1968 the Black Widows medevaced 245 soldiers wounded in action from the battlefield. During the 1968 communist TET Offensive and at LZ Sally, more lives were saved. The most depressing experience for a flight crew was the extraction of the dead from the field, wrapped in a body bag and the sobering flight to Graves Registration.

First Sergeant Ray "Big Cambodia" DePalm, while visiting battalion in October, was invited to a USO show being performed for our sister company, the 242<sup>nd</sup> ASHC "Muleskinners". After the performance Top approached the two Filipino groups and made arrangements for them to perform at Dau Tieng for the 188<sup>th</sup>. So, when Top returned to the company, the building of a stage for the USO show, was set in motion. On November 7, 1967 the 188<sup>th</sup> celebrated their first anniversary, with live entertainment featuring "BABY CHIT and D'ROCKETTES" (5 women), a barbeque and cake cutting ceremony. Top was the master of ceremony during the shows. The company area was shoulder deep with soldiers from all across the base, who crowded in to watch. The front rows were filled with the AV8ERS and many were chosen to come up on stage and dance. None of the major headliner USO shows ever came to Dau Tieng or LZ Sally. The second USO show at Dau Tieng was the Kim Chi Trio who performed at 1700 hours on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, at the Black Widow Theater. In January the company had a third and last USO show, just prior to TET '68. 188<sup>th</sup> command and their lucky crews were the only ones to see Bob Hope's Christmas Special at Cu Chi. There were no USO shows during our time at LZ Sally. These shows did wonders for the morale in the 188<sup>th</sup> and were definitely the high points during the unit's existence.

The 188<sup>th</sup> flew a CA on Thanksgiving Day and shared a hot turkey dinner, with all the trimmings, in the field with the 3/22 Infantry. Prior to Thanksgiving Madame Thu Huong, better known as "Hanoi Hannah" broadcast over our company frequency, that the Local Force VC units in the area would be eating Thanksgiving dinner in our company area...never happened, but the company area was hit that night with mortar fire and put on red alert. At 1800 hours on Christmas Eve the company area and Web were hit with mortar, 107mm rocket, small arms and sniper fire. New Years eve day was spent training with 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces at Tay Ninh East, getting familiar with the use of McGuire rigs for repelling. Back at Dau Tieng, the rest of the company was treated to a mortar attack and red alert to bring in the New Year.

According to the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association database, 7,013 Bell UH-1 "hueys" served during the Vietnam War. Of the 696 C models, 415 were destroyed along with 167 pilots and 158 crewmembers killed in action. Of the 3,375 H models, 1,285 were destroyed along with 457 pilots and 478 crewmembers killed in action. The Black Widows added 41 names to the above totals. Eighteen from the 188<sup>th</sup>, fourteen from C/101 and 2 former Black Widows, who had been transferred to other aviation companies or were on their second tour of duty. All of their names are engraved on "The Wall" in Washington DC. The 188<sup>th</sup> had a casualty rate of 30% during its existence in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968.



## **Combat Slang**

No matter what your unit patch was, the troops always hung some sort of nickname on every combat patch designed. They have done it for everyone that has been designed and there is no getting around the humorous approach which, fortunately, the American soldier insists on taking toward life. It made for healthy interaction between commands in the Vietnam Combat Zone. The 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade patch, proudly worn by the Black Widows, was commonly referred to as, "Chicken on a Stick." A few other favorites are listed below:

1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command, "The Leaning Out-House"  
1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, "The Big Dead One"  
Fourth Infantry Division, "The Funky Fourth"  
Ninth Infantry Division, "The Flower Power"  
25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, "The Electric Strawberry"  
101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, "The Puking Buzzards"  
199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade, "The Bloody Pussies"

### **Chopper Gunner**

**Words by John Nordenstrom**

**1<sup>st</sup> Platoon Door Gunner**

**Music from The Green Berets**

Fighting soldiers in the sky  
chopper gunners raise hell and die  
fighting Charlie and kickin' ass  
while all the pilots are smokin' grass

Chorus: Silver wings upon my chest  
make me one of America's best  
100 men shot at today  
and maybe 3 got away

Trained to live off broads and booze  
with my M-60 we cannot lose  
for we can fight or fly away  
and we don't wear no damn beret

Chorus

Back at home my girlfriend waits  
her chopper gunner has met his fate  
he went down in a burst of flame  
Xin Loi Ol' buddy, that's the name of the game

Chorus

Now when my little boy is grown  
don't send him out there all alone  
out in the jungle with them damn things  
just so he can get his wings

**188<sup>th</sup> Theme Song**  
**by 1st Platoon Door Gunner, John Nordenstrom**  
**Sung to the tune of Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues"**

Hear the beat of a thousand feet  
that's the 188<sup>th</sup> in full retreat . . .

Chorus  
They're moving on . . . They'll soon be gone

When the mortars come  
We'll be on the run . . . we'll be moving on

In the LZ receiving fire  
I ain't scared, but I'm a goddamn liar

Chorus  
I'm moving on . . . I'll soon be gone

When the mortars fly  
We'll be in the sky . . . we'll be moving on

Black Widow 6 was doing fine  
till he placed his skid on an old land mine . . .

Chorus  
he's moving on . . . he'll soon be gone

When the land mine blows  
he'll be on the go . . . he's moving on

Rockets and mortars overhead  
If we don't haul ass, we'll all be dead

Chorus  
We're moving on . . . we'll soon be gone

When the gunships come, the VC run . . .  
They're moving on

Vietnamese moon . . . shining bright  
LZ Sally's going to get hit tonight

Chorus  
We're moving on . . . we'll soon be gone

With the bunkers here  
We're safe . . . we're clear . . .  
We're moving on

Vietnamese girls are OK. . .  
But I want a round eye from the USA

Chorus  
I'm moving on, I'll soon be gone

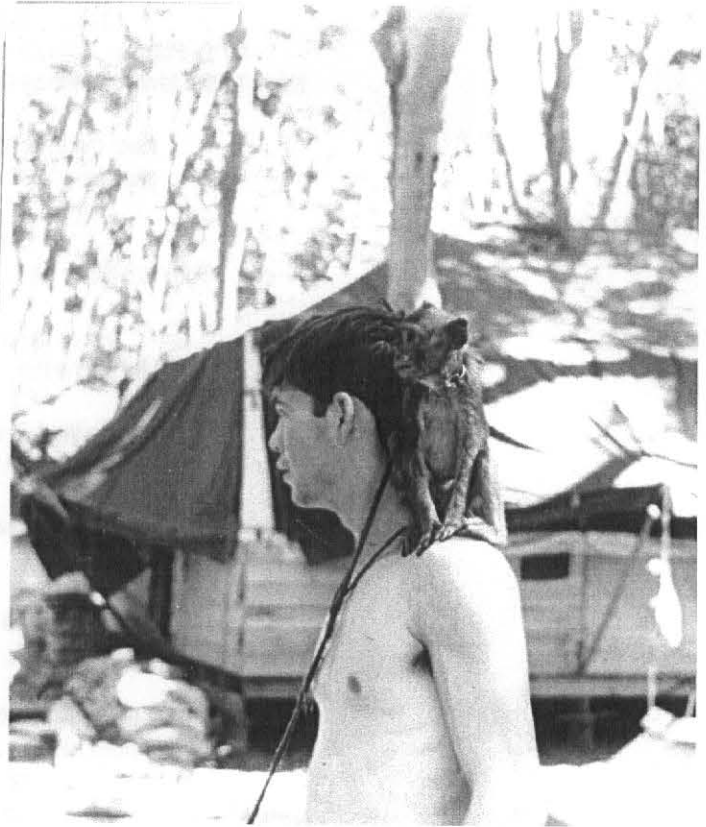
When my DEROS is here  
I'll be drinking beer . . .  
When I start moving on!

# MASCOTS



Dick Detra Collection

**"FUQURE 6" TRYING TO GET SOME  
FROM "SPIDER". 1967**



Ron Merlock Collection

**CWO GEORGE JONES AND FUQURE 6 AFTER HOURS  
IN THE 2ND PLATOON AREA AT DAU TIENG. NOTICE  
THE RUBBER TREES WHICH WE HAD TO PAY THE  
FRENCH FOR DAMAGING DURING OUR STAY AT  
DAU TIENG, OCTOBER 1967**



Kjell Tollefsen Collection

**KJELL TOLLEFSEN (LEFT) KEN POKORSKI (RIGHT)  
OUTSIDE OF MESS HALL - DAU TIENG 1967  
TWO OF THE MASCOT DOGS.**



Dick Detra Collection

**"WEB" PICTURE TAKEN AT LZ SALLY JUST  
BEFORE WEB WAS KILLED FOLLOWING A  
HAND GRENADE INCIDENT. SEE STORY ON  
MASCOTS FOR DETAILS**

## Mascots

Soon after June 24's devastating mortar attack, which damaged 29 of the 31 Hueys, a change of command took place. Our new XO, Major Joe Sites, was directed by battalion to do three specific things. First, build up morale; second, get the troops' billets, bunker line, and airfield revetments in order; and last, but not least, teach the rudiments of formation flying. With the help of the local Vietnamese day hires, the XO's first order of business was the appropriation of two young puppies. The German shepherd he named "SPIDER" and the golden short hair mix he named "WEB." Home base for our new mascots was the XO's hootch. When the pair began roaming about the area, the aviators welcomed Spider and Web with open arms and plenty of hand-outs. It was common knowledge that the Vietnamese enjoyed dining on dog meat, but our new mascots were taken off the menu. It gave the flight crews a warm feeling after a long day of flying, being shot at, or maybe even shot down, to happen upon Spider or Web casually wagging their tails. Whenever the XO was scheduled to fly "Ash and Trash" (slang term used by aviators for LOG flights), he made a point of bringing Spider along for a little flight time.

One afternoon the XO slipped out of the orderly room, jumped into the parked jeep out front and fired it up. Spider was relaxing under one of the rear wheels trying to stay cool and was unaware that he had picked a bad place to hang out. The XO put the jeep into reverse and hit the gas resulting in a high pitched, blood curdling bark as the jeep rolled over Spider. It was a sad day for the Black Widows as Spider was buried along the bunker line with full military honors.

There were a few Regular Line Officers (RLO) and a West Point type who liked to refer to our Warrant Officers as being only "Half an Officer." This attitude resulted in an under current of resentment which, from time to time, caused problems within the company. The 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon had a good mix of pilots, crew chiefs, and door gunners, and were lead by the respected and well liked 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Charlie Maurer. One of the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon warrants decided to acquire a spider monkey from the local Vietnamese and wanted, in a subtle way, to give it back to the RLO's who were always on their case. To put a little spin on the CO's call sign, CW2 George Jones named the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon mascot, "Phuquer 6." Secured to one of the hooches by a long parachute cord, the monkey had freedom to move about the area. From the beginning, the monkey seemed a little strange and wasn't adapting well to Army life. Besides frightening the hootch maids, who refused to enter any of the tents within his reach, he spared no one from his frequent out bursts, biting, and shit throwing antics. He sought the safety of the rubber trees after being chased out, and, on a few occasions, thrown out of 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon hooches.

As time went by, he kept getting worse . . . something along the lines of a raving, deranged, rabies-induced monkey from hell. Before Spiders demise, the monkey would constantly try to mount the male dog. He would also enjoy sitting on your shoulder and vigorously try to hump your ear. Something drastic had to be done . . . so on the night before our exodus north, CW 2 Wesley Gager volunteered to put the monkey out of his, and our, misery. As the monkey watched from his perch high up in a rubber tree, Wesley took aim with his M-2 carbine and blew the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon mascot away. The monkey was then deposited into the closest "honey pot" (used for burning shit), and was cremated.

In March, 1968, shortly after the heavy fighting of Tet '68, the Black Widows moved 450 miles north to a barren grave riddled piece of ground called LZ Sally, home of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Web was stowed away aboard one of the C-130's transporting our men and equipment into our new northern I Corps Area of Operations. Web blended into his new surroundings as the Black Widows went about the task of transforming, from scratch, a defendable defensive position and their new home.

On May 18, 1968, a disgruntled SP/4 Leroy McKeever made a decision which would result in the unit's only fragging incident. From the time he had arrived at the unit in October, there were many tell tale signs that he was unstable and should be removed from duty. His request for an emergency leave had been denied, along with being demoted from SP/4 to PFC by our CO, Major Jack Johnson, who was at that time out of the country on R&R. The XO, Captain John Schaibly and SFC Joe Helvey, confronted McKeever a short distance from the orderly tent. After a heated discussion prior to which McKeever had removed the safety pin from a grenade, McKeever loosened the grip on the grenade he was holding in his hand and a distinctive "POP" was heard. There was a blur of activity as everyone scrambled for cover with the exception of SP/4 McKeever and SFC Joe Helvey who froze. The explosion tore into both men sending body parts flying in all directions. Web, drawn to the sounds and smells of the explosion, happened upon one of the larger body parts, a forearm, snatched it up, and headed for the mess tent. Once inside, those present were shocked to see what Web was chewing on. Captain Harley May pulled out his .45 caliber pistol and shot Web dead on the spot . . . another sudden and violent casualty of that crazy war.

## The History of the 603<sup>rd</sup> Cargo Helicopter Field Maintenance (CHFM) Detachment

The 603<sup>rd</sup>, Widow Menders, was formed at Fort Campbell concurrently with the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light) and was the direct support maintenance unit attached to the 188<sup>th</sup>. When I arrived at Fort Campbell, I was given a Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E), some requisition forms, and borrowed a clerk typist from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. We requested everything in the TO&E and within a week or so, things started arriving. We never did receive some of the shop vans and fork lifts to train on. This equipment was shipped by sea with the new H model slicks and C Model Gunships. **The 188<sup>th</sup> was the first aviation company to arrive in Vietnam with the new UH-1H models.** I remember having to fly to Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky, in the middle of the winter, to pick-up some test equipment in one of the slicks we were training in. Since these aircraft were going to be used in Vietnam, they weren't equipped with heaters. . . . I've never been so cold in my life.

The 603<sup>rd</sup> was the first element to leave Fort Campbell and arrive in Vietnam. We completely filled one C-141 cargo aircraft. Just prior to landing, I had everyone put on newly starched fatigues before we deplaned. We marched off and formed up on the tarmac. We were met by a large group of dignitaries from the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade. They asked if this was the 188<sup>th</sup>? I said, "No, sir. This is the 603<sup>rd</sup> Maintenance Detachment, their direct support unit." The Brigade and Battalion Commanders said, "WELCOME TO VIETNAM!!! You are the sharpest unit we have seen arrive." Then they walked off. I'm sure they were upset that we were not the 188<sup>th</sup>.

Our heavy equipment was convoyed from Long Binh to Dau Tieng. Some of our troops, who sailed with the new equipment,

joined with the convoy. Before leaving Long Binh, while waiting for the convoy to form, SP/4 Richard Moore took shelter from the heat under the landing gear of the shop van. The landing gear collapsed and SP/4 Richard Moore was crushed to death. . . . our first casualty of the war.

I flew to Dau Tieng and met the convoy. 269<sup>th</sup> Battalion personnel kicked tents and c-rations off some trucks and told me to make sure the general purpose (GP) medium tents were lined up or they would be struck and we would have to put them up again. I was told not to cut down or deface any rubber trees because they belonged to the **Michelin Rubber Company** and we would have to pay for them. What a way to fight a war! I asked where we could get a shower and was told that it rains every day at 2:00 p.m. Needless to say, the next day, there were 40 or more naked guys out on the company road with soap and towel in hand.

On the night of June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1967, after returning from an operation with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, our helicopters were lined up on the dirt runway for maintenance repairs. A Viet Cong observer watching from high up on a tower in the village had patiently waited for this particular situation to occur. From a mortar position NW of the base camp, a VC mortar team walked one hundred rounds from one end of the flight line to the other destroying or damaging **29 of the company's 31** brand new Hueys. Some of the aircraft were evacuated by the 242<sup>nd</sup> ASHC, "Muleskinners", to Cu Chi and Saigon for repairs. The 603<sup>rd</sup> had nineteen flyable the next day. The damaged aircraft were replaced with D model slicks and B model gunships. We had all the maintenance work we needed after that devastating mortar attack and had the 188<sup>th</sup> operational in about ten days.

CWO Douglas McFarland was the unit XO, M/SGT Ray Caudle was the First Sergeant, and SSG Fred Nitchy was the shop foreman. We performed most maintenance at night in the rain with flashlights. . . . making the job extremely difficult. It was sometimes more difficult to find the aircraft to be worked on or test flown than to make the repairs. About two months after our arrival, all my sheet metal men were transferred to the infantry to fill some of their vacant slots due to heavy combat casualties. We learned a lot about using duct tape after they departed!

During my last month in country, the 188<sup>th</sup> was transferred to LZ Sally, located north of Hue. Doug McFarland and SSG Nitchy stayed behind at Camp Rainier with me to repair some aircraft we had cannibalized for parts. We had them up and running in about seven days and then flown to LZ Sally by our flight crews. Our time at Dau Tieng had come to an end. I left for home ten days later. I want to thank Jim Wilson from the Prop and Rotor Shop for his help in compiling this information.

Source: LTC Gary Beaulieu (Retired) and Jim Wilson (Rotor Shop)

### 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment

I received orders to join the 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment at Fort Knox Kentucky which was being attached to the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company in March of 1967. My wife dropped me off at Fort Campbell, Kentucky on April 28<sup>th</sup> and the next thing that I knew, during the night in the middle of a downpour, we got on an Air Force C-141 and twenty-four hours later were dropped off at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. The next day we boarded some C-123s and were let off in Dau Tieng. I found a canvas cot in a GP medium pitched under some rubber trees, with water running across the floor and was told that this was to be my home. I felt a little better after they handed out 38 caliber revolvers, which I kept loaded under my pillow at night and close at hand during the daytime. As this was considered a combat zone, we had to wear steel pots and a sidearm at all times. Sergeant Barlow was in charge of the medical detachment and we set up a tent for holding sick call. In order to exempt the men in the medical detachment from pulling guard duty, we volunteered to burn the shit. The medics, therefore, spent three or four hours a day mixing JP-4 jet fuel with cans full of excrement stirring it up and creating a gigantic smoke screen. As you know, shit burning was the preferred mode of disposing of human waste throughout Vietnam because of the high ground water table. There was not a lot to do other than have sick call once a day and I was not real thrilled about flying door gunner on combat assaults. I, therefore, spent some time with the battalion flight surgeon in Cu Chi and also helped out in Tay Ninh with the bird dog unit that was present there.

Source: William E. Atlee, Jr., M.D.

### Chancre 6

I arrived in the RVN fresh out of flight surgeon training around Thanksgiving, 1967. All the incoming flight surgeons were given a few days of in-country orientation and finally given certain choices of duty assignments. We could be assigned catch or catch can or if we volunteered for certain **"less desirable"** units or locations, those volunteers would get priority for "soft touch" locations like Vung Tau or Nha Trang for the second half of their tour. . . . WOW, I thought. My then wife, Sandra, was talking about getting a civilian job in Vietnam if I could get an assured "neat" assignment for the last six months, I'd pick one of "those." I picked a pleasant sounding place, in the middle of the Michelin Rubber Plantation, called Dau Tieng. I was not aware that the flight surgeon I was replacing was recovering from a mortar fragment wound he'd received during the November 9, 1967 mortar and ground attack on the 188<sup>th</sup>'s company perimeter.

I arrived at Dau Tieng in early December and was met by Captain Phil Snodgrass, a regular Army flight surgeon, who within five minutes was proudly showing me his healing fragment entry wound. Right on cue, I went on my first run from CW4 Sonny Liston's hootch to the sand bagged bunker twenty feet away as three incoming explosions went off seemingly very close to my sleeping cot. I made two other runs that night as I had not learned the very different sounds of **"IN COMING"** versus **"OUT GOING."** Dr. Snodgrass departed, leaving command of the 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment in my incapable and inexperienced hands.

Our mission, as I soon learned, was to provide medical care for the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company. Under my command was SP/4 John Sechler and Sergeant Jim Gallini, both draftees like myself. A few days before Christmas, I received an exciting phone call on my field phone. It was my wife informing me that she and Roberta Mennis, the wife of another flight surgeon, had just arrived in Saigon and she wasn't going home without me! That meant she was going to figure out a way to spend a year in Vietnam, legally. . . . which she did until TET '68 turned Vietnam on its ear.

In January 1968, the Black Widows were supporting the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces and their "FREE CAMBODIAN" allies in a somewhat illegal operation in the then "neutral" Cambodian countryside. They were gathering intelligence and harassing VC and NVA base camps (also illegally in Cambodia). The company TDY'd west to Tay Ninh East, which was just inside the Cambodian border and conducted extensive operations with the 154<sup>th</sup> medics treating the clap and colds with missionary zeal.

Of course, the peak of my tour was my experience during the night of January 30, 1968, when the whole world exploded in the Tet offensive. With our perimeter attacked by Viet Cong and NVA regulars, everyone worried about the threat of VC sappers tunneling into Camp Rainier, which was scary and terribly exhilarating. By the third day and no let up in sight, Black Widow 6, Major Jack O. Johnson, allowed me to leave base for one day . . . to see if my wife was OK in Saigon. I hitched a chopper ride to Cu Chi and then another slick carrying 2.75 rockets into the besieged Ton Son Nhut airport on the outskirts of Saigon at low level (actually at ground level or a little above) the entire flight. I later learned how close the VC and NVA came to over running the airport defenses. If they had secured our artillery, they could have done to Saigon what they did to Hue. Sandra and Roberta were watching the battle from the roof of the deserted Air Force Officer's BOQ at the Auriga Hotel, located just a few blocks from the airport. They were frightened, but fine. I left them the M-16 I had borrowed and later brought them a box of white phosphorous hand grenades which, thank God, they never used.

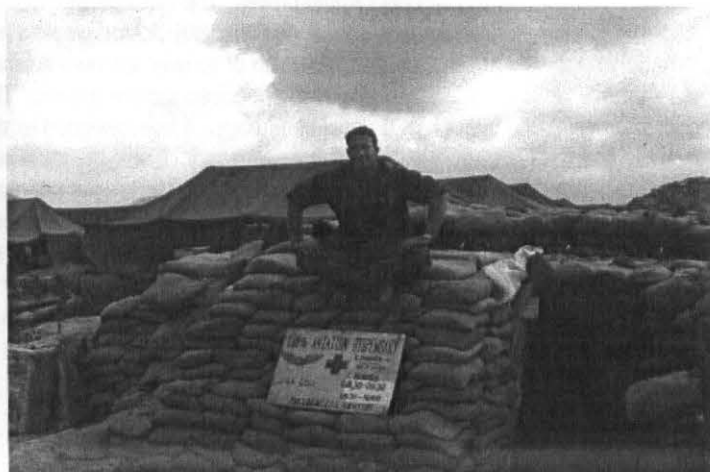
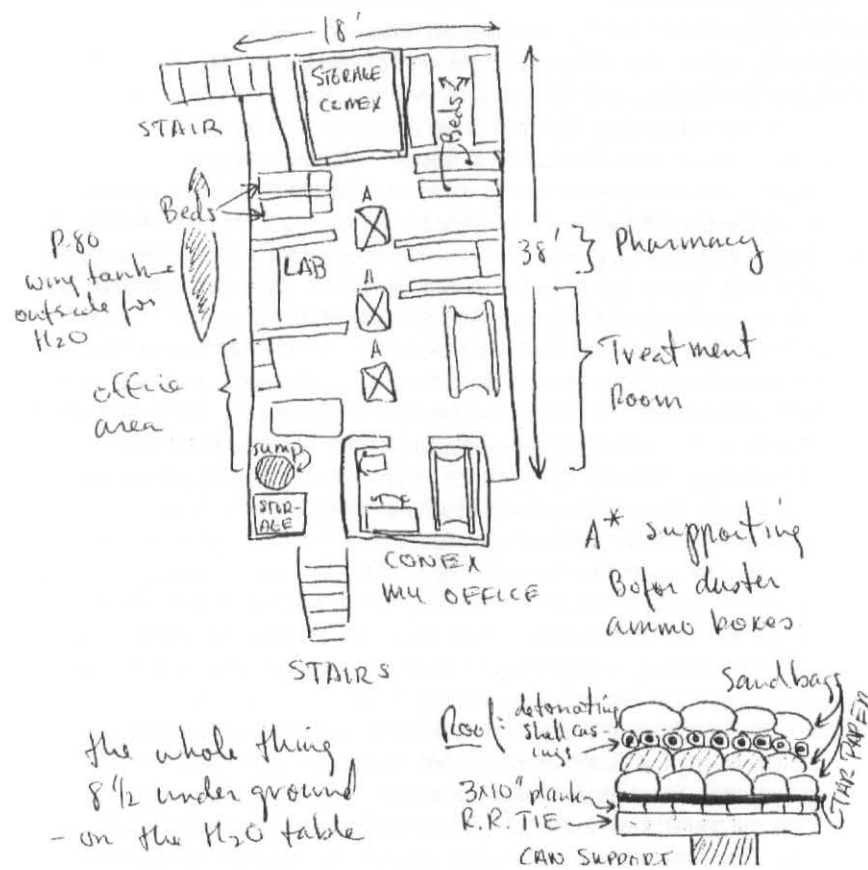
February was chock full of operations, as the war had really heated up. Then in March came the hurry up and move orders that gave the entire company . . . with its supporting detachments five days to move . . . lock, stock, and barrel, to a wonderful location way up in I Corps, somewhere just shy of North Vietnam itself. The base was called Landing Zone Sally. Not a camp, just a Landing Zone with no fence, fortifications, or anything. We loaded our medical supplies, jeep, and cracker box ambulance onto C-130 and C-123's . . . deplaning in the ancient imperial capital of Vietnam, Hue. The NVA had just been evicted from the city and ancient palaces of Vietnamese kings, the Citadel. We convoyed north, passing through the war torn but still beautiful city of Hue. About 12 clicks north . . . there she was, Sally. 8" howitzers, some 155 mm howitzer batteries, a few Screaming Eagle infantry units, and us. Thirty juicy Hueys and hardly anything to stop a determined enemy. We were thirty or so miles south from the land of Ho Chi Minh. We started digging . . . all day and night for a week. What started as a bunker to protect us from enemy rocket and mortar fire grew into a 20 x 40 foot excavation with the intention of creating a somewhat small, mortar proof field hospital. The problem was. . . there were zero materials available to build with at Landing Zone Sally. No wood, supplies, concrete, or any type of building material could be found at this very isolated outpost. Careful scrutiny of the ambient surroundings revealed two sources of construction material. First, running through the base camp was the old French built railroad that once connected Hanoi with Saigon. The French war and later ours rendered the line abandoned and unused. A hasty consultation with the artillery types regarding the techniques of using C-4 plastic explosives and the possibility of blowing the rails off the railroad to use as roof supports for the hospital went extremely well. Sergeant Jim Gallini, myself, and a couple of adventurous EM's succeeded in blowing one hundred feet of track from the rail line and hauled them to the "pit." The other abundant commodity at Sally was the wooden crates used to transport the 155 mm howitzer ammo. The guns fired around the clock, sending high explosive rounds into the surrounding area and leaving beau-coup empty wooden ammo crates. The red legs who had just returned from the field were in dire need of tetracycline for the clap and cortisone cream for jock itch. A deal was struck, and we now had thousands of ammo crates to cannibalize into wall and roof material for the field hospital bunker. A month or so later we were finished . . . with lots of help from other Black Widow mates. The bunker measured 18' x 35' long and was dug eight feet deep into the ground. The roof consisted of two layers of 155mm shell casings, two layers of chicken wire, and five layers deep of sand bags. It was designed to stop any mortar round Charlie might fire, and might even stop a Russian made 122 mm Katushka rocket if necessary. It was the most popular place to be at Sally when the NVA made probes and lit up the base camp with incoming mortar and rocket fire trying to take out our Hueys.

The 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment bunker was completed in May of 1968. Sometime in early June a jaunty Captain named John Hannah, M.D. off loaded from a helicopter saying he was the new flight surgeon for the Black Widows and that I was out of a job. After a few days of packing and saying goodbye to many of my friends, I left for my new assignment, Dong Bathin . . . located just across the water from Cam Rahn Bay and my final "soft touch" posting in Vietnam. I was told later that the next monsoon season the bunker flooded and soon collapsed on itself . . . a reflection of much of our efforts during the Vietnam War.

Source: Lyle Parker, M.D.



# DOC PARKER'S MED BUNKER LZ SALLY



## 4<sup>TH</sup> Signal Detachment

### 4<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment, Avionics - Formed in October, 1966 and deployed with 188<sup>th</sup> Helicopter Company in Spring, 1967.

The purpose of separate Avionics Detachments was to provide avionics repair support to aviation companies. Detachments were intended to operate independently; to do this they had their own staffing and equipment. Detachments had an assigned strength of approximately ten enlisted men with one NCO and a Warrant officer or Commissioned Officer as Detachment Commander. Detachments, despite small size, had their own Morning Report and organizationally had all of the reports and administrative paper work of a full sized unit. The 4<sup>th</sup> Signal was equipped to repair radios, navigation equipment, and associated equipment, on any Army aircraft, rotary or fixed wing. We were expected to give repair support to the 188<sup>th</sup> and any other Army aircraft in our area. Because of our equipment and electronics background, we often helped the 603 TC DET with general aircraft electrical problems from defective weapons systems to lighting and engine controls. The 4<sup>th</sup> also serviced emergency beacons, headsets, helmets, and ground based radios.

## Fort Campbell

The 4<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment was organized to provide Avionics Support for the 188<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company. I reported for duty on October 26, 1966 after completing Signal officers Branch School and Avionics training at Ft. Gordon, Georgia. At the time, a temporary CO, Major Taylor, commanded the 188<sup>th</sup>. Like me, he was a signal officer and had a patient way with me, a green 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant fresh out of Branch School. The 4<sup>th</sup> was also assigned an acting NCO, Sergeant Jarrett, who had already finished a tour in Vietnam. Initially, the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal was located in an office in the company barracks, across the hall from the CO. Being a detachment commander, I was given a prime parking space in front of the company building. This space quickly evaporated as more senior officers started arriving at the 188<sup>th</sup>. Soon the 4<sup>th</sup> was assigned a long, narrow room next to the 603<sup>rd</sup>, in the hanger building at the airfield. As the men assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> started arriving, they shared space with the men of the 188<sup>th</sup>. Our day always started with a meeting at 7:00 a.m. and frequently the officers living off base would gather in the mess hall for breakfast. After our company meeting, we would go to the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal's area or to the airfield to begin the day.

At first, Ft. Campbell wanted us to locate our aircraft in a small grass field at the entrance to the airfield. To this end, Lt. Dave Bush and I measured off the area and he tried to put a plan together. Fortunately, reason prevailed, and we were assigned spaces on the airfield in front of the hanger. At the same time, the 4<sup>th</sup> began accumulating its members and equipment (2, 2 ½ ton trucks, a 3/4 ton, and a jeep). We also received a complement of radio test sets, instruments, and spare parts. The equipment on our approved equipment list had to be requisitioned. Two major pieces never arrived, two truck mountable electronic repair shelters, housing workbenches, and air conditioners, but these finally showed up at Sacramento Army Depot days before our deployment. Life at Fort Campbell was relatively uneventful. Probably the most interesting and useful was our days in the field where we got the opportunity to work out of a tent and contemplate our future. As the 188<sup>th</sup>, 603<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grew in the early winter of 1966, our daily routine focused on familiarizing ourselves with equipment and filling out endless forms to assess our readiness for deployment. The 4<sup>th</sup> Signal was fortunate to be assigned an experienced NCO, Sergeant Jimmie Hicks, from Clarksville, Tennessee. Sgt. Hicks had already had one tour and would often tell us "it won't be so bad." He was good with the troops and tuned into their needs and concerns. He knew what we would have to do and helped us prepare for our new job: keeping the avionics of the 188<sup>th</sup> working. Having a home in the area, Jimmie would sometimes have the men to his home for a party. The original 4<sup>th</sup> signal personnel at Ft. Campbell were:

Lt. Charles Bagnaschi	Raez	Clawson	Tony Skerbitz
Sgt. Jimmie Hicks	Austin	Benny Scott	Ray Blake
Branch	Larry Green	John Rementer	

When we deployed in the spring, several of us from the 4<sup>th</sup> traveled out to Sharp Army Depot in Stockton, California to travel to Vietnam on the Kula Gulf (1). The Kula Gulf was a small, Korean-era aircraft carrier. It had the remnants of wooden flight deck and steam catapult. There was an elevator to aircraft storage below decks where our helicopters were stored with their blades removed. We also carried Mohawk fixed-wing aircraft destined for another unit. Life on the Kula Gulf was good with only light KP duty for the enlisted troops and lots of time to explore the ship and watch the changing Pacific. Our contingent consisted of Bruce Wright, Boyd Morrow, Johnnie Spearman, Henry Cauthen, Ray Blake and several other I can't recall. We left Oakland late in the day, passing Alcatraz Island and then under the Golden Gate Bridge. We sailed directly to Vietnam with the only land sighting being some of the outlying Philippine Islands. (1) USS Kula Gulf (CVE-108)dp. 11,373; 1. 557'1"; b. 75'; ew. 105'2"; dr. 32'; s. 19K.; cpl. 1,066; a. 25", 36 40-mm., 20 20mm., ac. 34; cl. Commencement Bay "... training pilots of helicopter, air-antisubmarine, and fighter squadrons to strengthen U.S. forces in Korea."

When the Korean conflict brought an urgent need for a greatly expanded need throughout the world, Kula Gulf recommissioned at Boston 15 February 1951, Captain Alden D. Schwarz in command. After shakedown out of Guantanamo bay, Cuba, the escort carrier departed Norfolk 6 August and carried a cargo of airplanes to Casablanca, French Morocco. Following her return to Norfolk 1 September, she spent the next 15 months training pilots of helicopter, air-antisubmarine, and fighter squadrons to strengthen U.S. forces in Korea. From: Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships

## Vung Tau

We arrived at Vung Tau on 18 May 1967, the helicopters were re-assembled and flown off the ship's deck to a nearby landing area. The fixed-wing aircraft were lowered to barges and taken ashore. W.O. Howard Liston was in Vung Tau to meet me. Howard picked me up in a newly painted jeep. Howard would not tell me exactly how he came upon this jeep, but I noticed that it had blue paint under the new green topcoat. I spent my first night, May 18, in Saigon, and the next day flew out to Dau Tieng to rejoin the 188<sup>th</sup>.

## Dau Tieng

My first night, May 19, at Dau Tieng left me with the most vivid memory of my entire year. Lt. Dave Bush was Security Officer and offered to show me around as he made his evening rounds of the perimeter guards. We made a circle of the 188<sup>th</sup> area and it soon began to rain. Just after we passed a guard's bunker at the rear of the 603rd's area, a tremendous explosion destroyed bunker #4 killing or wounding everyone inside. The rain intensified and the company area was deep in water and mud. The first experience in the 188<sup>th</sup> company area terrified me and stayed with me for quite a while. Fortunately, most of the days that followed were much better.

When we first set up at Dau Tieng, we had no dependable power other than portable generators and glorified extension cords strung around the company area tents. Soon, officers began accumulating refrigerators for their tents and those with lights and stereos would smoke the wires on an almost nightly basis. I took on the task of going out and repairing burnt wires and getting the electricity back on the best I could. On one particular evening, I was reading by my bunk when a visiting officer asked to use an empty bunk across from mine. I nodded approval and went on with my reading. As usual, the lights went out and I let out a few expletives about the refrigerators and left to get the electricity back on. With the lights back on, I returned to my tent to find the visiting officer was a chaplain who had come by for Sunday services the next morning — so much for my big mouth! As time went on, company buildings were built, tents were put on platforms, and we constructed a mail room. The greatest feat of engineering was heated showers using wing tanks for water storage and solar and kerosene heaters for warming the water for evening showers. Follow-on construction included club buildings for the enlisted men and for the officers. Prior to having a building, the officers' club was a tent. Not being a pilot, I took on additional day jobs as club treasurer, banking officer, class-6 officer, and movie officer. With these extra duties, I would frequently make day-trips to Saigon to do company business.

Our first task to get the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal up and running was to set up repair shops at the edge of the landing strip close to the 603<sup>rd</sup> repair area. Our electronics shelters had come over from Stockton Depot separately and had to be retrieved and flown in by Chinook. Our location was across the road from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division field hospital and lowering the shelters in with CH-47's raised a huge amount of dust and agitated the hospital staff. With the arrival of our shelters, and portable trailer mounted generators, we were able to set up operations. Upon setting up our two new electronics repair shelters, we found that all of the four built-in air conditioners did not survive the trip to Vietnam. Having no windows or ventilation, air conditioning was essential to use the repair vans. Lt DeBella had sent over a small portable unit that we used until our own units could be repaired.

Our routine was to service aircraft in the evening after a day's flying. Our 4<sup>th</sup> Signal crew was set up to man a night shift and a day shift. Repair activity went on day and night shift rotation at dinner and breakfast times. We were fortunate to have all new aircraft and equipment starting out. Parts availability was a problem, but we managed to scrounge most of what we needed. One curiosity was the shortage of headsets for plugging into the aircraft intercom/radios. With headsets in short supply, we learned to order the components and assemble complete headsets.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Signal served the 188<sup>th</sup> and any visiting aircraft with radio and general avionics repairs. After removal from aircraft, radios were repaired or sent to the next higher-level repair facility. Helicopter vibration would frequently take radios out of adjustment and repairs were frequent. Often we would modify the headsets, cutting down the springs, to provide more ear comfort. We would also rig up patch cords to connect the aircraft radios to tape recorders. Stereo equipment repair was a spare time sideline for anyone who needed help. Soon after arriving at Dau Tieng our crew consisted of Sgt. Jimmie Hicks, John Rementer, Denver Cole, Nunogowa, Clawson, Wachtor, Neil Connelly, Scott, Auston, Raez, Green, Branch, Sgt. Fields, Tony Skerbitz, and Ray Blake.

One of the more unusual requests we got was to fix weather balloon tracking equipment for the nearby tracking station run by CWO Neneighbor. CWO Neneighbor had done a tour of combat duty in Korea and had been through some tough times. Talking with him helped me put a better perspective on the Dau Tieng experience. The weather balloon tracking site at Dau Tieng was across the road from an artillery battery. One memorable day, I was inside helping with the radio equipment when a series of loud blasts shook the building and made the lights flicker. Neneighbor explained that this was just outgoing and told me to relax. Afterwards we went outside to learn that we had been under attack and the explosions were incoming!

On the night of the June 24, 1967 mortar attack, two 4<sup>th</sup> Signal members were injured while working on the airfield. Both Rementer and Clawson were out on the flight line when the incoming mortars were "walked" down our line of aircraft. Fortunately, 4<sup>th</sup> Signal injuries were not serious enough to require more than a week of hospitalization. After the damage of this attack, we had most of our aircraft disabled. It was unclear how repair and replacement would be handled. All of our equipment being new, there was a concern voiced that our replacement equipment would be beat up and less reliable than what we already had. We decided to remove radios from the damaged aircraft and install them on our repaired or replacement aircraft. In any event, this was a bad decision on my part and people were upset with the whole affair. The week following the mortar attack, I spent flying with Major Morrow and Lt. Dave Bush all over III Corp collecting badly needed repair parts to put our aircraft back in the air. This is when the 188<sup>th</sup> got Major McWhorter assigned as our new CO.

## Tuy Hoa

Our temporary move to Tuy Hoa was a big event for the 4<sup>th</sup>. We had to pull out our equipment and fly it North in C-130's. Tuy Hoa was a new experience; the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal set up their repair shelters and storage containers at the edge of the airfield. Tuy Hoa was a change from Dau Tieng; for one thing, the dry climate and beaches were great for occasional relaxation. Occasionally, our 2 ½ ton trucks were placed into service transporting men to and from the beach. By this time, we were gaining experience and for the most part, our day-to-day activity was routine. We didn't have to generate our own electrical power as we did in Dau Tieng and the dry climate was not as hard on equipment. We did, however, have to clean the sand out of control heads on a frequent basis. In addition to taking care of aircraft, we did occasional camera, tape recorder, and stereo repair.

Parts shortages were a continuing difficulty for the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal. Some basic items were often impossible to get through Army supply channels. Items such as radio grade solder we ordered directly from Allied Radio in the States using a procedure set up to allow direct

purchases. An unofficial supply channel for the 4<sup>th</sup> got started at Tuy Hoa when I ran into a college acquaintance, Air Force Lt. Joe Hallisy. Joe was also in the avionics business, but had a much better supply chain. I would let Joe know what I could not get, and he would find the parts and pass them on to me. After Vietnam, Joe entered electronic sales and would frequently call on my company. I always made it a point to drop what I was doing to spend a few minutes with Joe and do my best to try and give him our business.

Being somewhat removed from headquarters, Sgt. Hicks and crew took a single-sideband aircraft radio and rigged up a control box and wiring harness from a wrecked helicopter. This radio link served the 188<sup>th</sup> with a communications link which at the time was more dependable than the field telephones. This allowed direct communications to our headquarters in the south. It worked well, but the antenna radiated a strong field and you could light a fluorescent bulb by holding it in your hand and standing a few feet away from the wire.

Shortly afterward, while I was at Battalion headquarters and headed for breakfast, I overheard a radio message transmitted from our 4<sup>th</sup> Signal single sideband radio. Sadly, it was a list of individuals who perished the previous night in a mid-air collision. With great sadness and disbelief, I returned to Tuy Hoa bringing medical records for our lost friends. For all of us, this accident was probably one of the most difficult experiences to cope with.

Our assignment at Tuy Hoa soon ended and upon our return to Dau Tieng, Sgt. Hicks and his men conceived of using our two storage conex containers and two shelters as the corners for a repair building. The center area, fitted with a framed roof, served as an office with service counter while the shelters housed the repair shops. The empty conex containers acted as storage and work space. We covered one of the conex containers with sandbags to give the crew protection from mortars. After installation of a door, we were open for business. Our location was convenient for pilots walking back from the flight line and we had frequent visits to report problems and drop off helmets for repair. At Christmas, the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal crew decorated the building outline with lights - it wasn't much, but we were proud of it.

Although the company area was powered by a pair of large generators, we derived our power from a pair of trailer mounted, air cooled generators. Each trailer had a pair of generators fueled from 55 gallon fuel drums. These generators were a source of constant trouble; fortunately, we had a couple of good mechanics who could take them apart and replace parts. The 188<sup>th</sup> had a low-frequency radio beacon to home pilots into Dau Tieng. We placed the antenna beside the shop right off the end of the runway. Within weeks, the high power stage failed, but it was common practice to run with just the low-power signal generator connected to the antenna. Even at that, we got constant complaints that the beacon was interfering with the numerous stereos in the company living area. Fortunately, 188<sup>th</sup> pilots could easily tune in the beacon to help them locate home.

Repair of aircraft wiring became a specialty, especially cable damage from taking rounds! I give the men credit for spending long hours working in cramped places to find and then fix damaged wires. During repair operations, equipment was tested and repaired the best we could. Often radio problems experienced in flight would not show up on the ground. For these problems, we would exchange radios and check out the wiring in hope of fixing the problem.

On the silly side, the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal was told that it had to cut and maintain the grass on the field adjacent to our area. This was a source of complaint, but hey, it could have been worse! Life at Dau Tieng became tedious and occasionally someone would get a little stressed out. Often we would come up with a project to focus our energy. One was the construction of a "Command Console" complete with intercoms, radio control heads, and radios. We got help on the sheet metal from the 603<sup>rd</sup>. Next, we installed the wiring and control heads. I think it was flown several times and it served as a test box for various radios and control heads in the shop. It was also our communications console from shop to flight line used for constant testing. Another project was the installation of Single Sideband radios in our UH-1H's. This required installation of long-wire antennas, radios, tuning units, and control heads. I remember the crew taking lots of pride in doing this work. They were very protective of the ships they worked on. As a group, the men of the 4<sup>th</sup> worked together very well and took pride in their identity as the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal as well as being a part of the 188<sup>th</sup>. 4<sup>th</sup> Signal members designed and wore their own unit patch featuring aviator's wings and signal flags on a black background. 4<sup>th</sup> SIG DET AVIONICS and 188<sup>th</sup> AVN were lettered in white and the patch was outlined in gold.

## **Sgt. Fields**

Sgt. Fields joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Signal after it was in country. He assisted Sgt. Hicks and me, providing supervision and guidance for the men.

## **LZ Sally**

I learned of our planned move to LZ Sally upon returning from R&R. We had to dismantle our repair building and pack the shelters and conex containers. Being "short," I shipped most of my belongings home and traveled light. Our equipment was loaded on C-130's and flown to Da Nang, from there put on trucks for the trip to LZ Sally. LZ Sally was not much. The 1<sup>st</sup> CAV had pulled out and we were going in. The 4<sup>th</sup> set up across the road from the company living area and we went back to tents and repair shelters.

## **The Radio Jeep**

About that time, the 4<sup>th</sup> was authorized and acquired an elaborate communications radio set. I ordered the radio knowing that a specially equipped jeep and trailer were components of the radio. There was a directive that the Jeep was not to be separated from the radio equipment and that allowed us to keep the prized vehicle. Dr. Lyle Parker's wife was staying in Bangkok and we were able to set up a radio link from the Jeep radio to the Babcock MARS station. This went on for a few nights until we were discovered and asked to get off of the MARS network.

## **Dr. Parker's Infirmary and other LZ Sally Projects**

Dr. Lyle Parker decided he needed a secure treatment area for his work. He found an abandoned rail line nearby and went about

cutting the rails into roof beams using shaped charges molded from C4 plastic explosive. We had a great time working on this construction project. Other unofficial projects included installing fluorescent lights at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division field hospital and wiring the dentists' tools with electrical power.

## **WO Rudzinski**

WO Rudzinski arrived at LZ Sally as my replacement Detachment Commander in April of 1968.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Signal Roster, Early Summer, 1967**

Sgt. Jimmy Hicks, John Rementer, Denver Cole. Nunogowa, Clawson, Wachtor, Neil Connelly, Scott, Auston, Branch, Ray Blake, Sgt. Fields, Tony Skerbitz, LZ Sally, Spring, 1968: WO Rudzinski, Greg Pepper. 4<sup>th</sup> Signal/516<sup>th</sup> SIG DET: Ray Frerking, Pete Lyda, Larry Sasner, Lief Straub, Fred Wagner, Art Bogle. The 4<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment became the 516<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment after July 1, 1968.

Source: Charles L. Bagnaschi (Static 6) LT, Signal Corps

### **The Day Before Becoming Commander**

In preparation for the change of command for the 188<sup>th</sup> on 10 December 1967 Major Jack Johnson had moved his stuff from Cu Chi to Dau Tieng and made himself available to fly as a peter pilot on the daily missions that preceded the change. He wanted to get acquainted with how the missions were staged and get familiar with the different platoon leaders and AC's. He was assigned, as best he can recall, to fly with WO Ken Pokorski, Black Widow 48, who was the aircraft commander and his boss as long as they were in the aircraft. They were assigned to the number 10 aircraft at the tail end of the lift and were off to do combat assaults northwest of Dau Tieng in War Zone C.

They made their first combat assault into a cold LZ and as the flight was coming out of the LZ, Major Johnson was flying the aircraft. The flight crew would usually alternate flying during missions so each of them would do the actual flying on every other run. The flight had gotten to a couple of hundred feet out of the LZ over some really deep jungle when something gave up in the gear box or tail rotor transmission. The aircraft pitched up hard right rolling almost 90 degrees over to the right and every warning light and audio emergency signal came on. The rotor RPM went below the lower green line and air speed was going back fast and the only place to go was a little patch of bright green bamboo in the middle of a hole in the jungle below them.

Major Johnson got a quick MAYDAY out and went into auto rotation. He violated SOP's by not turning control of the aircraft over to the AC and still wonders if Ken has forgiven him for overriding his command of the aircraft.

In order to get into the only place we had to go we went into a high flare zero airspeed auto-rotation right over the hole and down we went into the bamboo. We had no idea how deep the bamboo was and as the green came up all around the ship Major Johnson couldn't wait any longer so he pulled full pitch, gritted his teeth, and waited for the crash. Just as the pitch came to full up the aircraft plopped down flat and level and by dumb ass luck had gone into 200 foot deep jungle and landed without a scratch. The chin bubble between the pilot's feet popped open when it settled down on an ant hill and other than that there was no damage to the aircraft. We all sat there for a second and looked at each other. Then we decided we needed to shut the aircraft down and get ready to get out of there; it was one thrilling ride down.

We pulled the radios and guns and piled them on top of the aircraft. Very shortly one of our other lift ships hovered down into our hole and we were able to pass up the radios, guns, etc. and crawl up onto their skids and haul ourselves into their aircraft. Major Johnson remembers that he was standing on the roof of the downed aircraft watching the rescue ship come down and the rotor blade of their aircraft was just clearing and sometime just touching this big old tree limb a few feet in front of the downed aircraft. He has often thought that these guys were pretty brave to come down into that mess and if they had hit that limb they would have ended up on top of us, but by outstanding flying ability, we all got out. He doesn't remember who was flying that aircraft that day, but if anyone reads this and remembers he wishes they would contact him so he can thank them again.

The troops we were inserting immediately set out from the LZ and before too long made it over to our emergency landing area and secured the aircraft. It was extracted later in the day by a Pipesmoke CH-47 using a double length sling to get it out of the hole it was in and hauled back to Dau Tieng. The guys from the 603<sup>rd</sup> had it repaired and flying in a couple of three days after the change of command of the company on 10 December 1967. Major Johnson doesn't think Ken Pokorski ever flew again with him and maybe for a good reason, you only get one of those miracles in your flying career and he had his that day.

Submitted by: Jack O. Johnson LTC (R) Black Widow 6 Dec 67-Jun 68

### **Pipesmoke Recovery**

Located at Phu Loi, the 605<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company was a repair facility for damaged aircraft (known to the aviators as the "Bone Yard"). When company maintenance folks couldn't wait to get needed parts through normal channels, they made runs to the "Bone Yard" to cannibalize parts off the hundreds of damaged Hueys.

Pipesmoke recovery was a section of the 605<sup>th</sup> TC and had two specially outfitted UH-1H slicks used to recover downed aircraft in the III Corps AO. Pipesmoke's area of operation extended west to Cambodia, east to the South China Sea, north to the beginning of the Central highlands, and south to the Mekong delta. On request, Pipesmoke flew north into the Central highlands, and south into the IV Corps AO.

Pipesmoke recovery supported the 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne, 1/4 CAV. Black horse, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalions, the US Navy, US Air Force, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces.

On a daily basis, one slick and a crew of 6 consisting of two pilots, crew chief, door gunner, and two riggers, were placed on strip alert while the second slick and crew were on standby. The crews made sure daily maintenance and pre-flights were completed, the Huey



was full of JP/4 fuel, had water and one case of C rations, and that their guns were clean and ready.

Recovery missions were called into operations by radio or land-line and then logged in. Coordinates were plotted on an area map along with the condition of the downed aircraft, the security of the area, whether the area was hot or cold, and what kind of terrain the aircraft was in (jungle, rice paddies, airfield, etc.).

Once all this information was sorted out, Pipesmoke planned and organized the recovery by getting clearance from the tower and, once airborne, the pilot radioed for artillery clearance. On the way, the pilot made radio contact with the downed aircraft through the aviation unit commander, or the ground unit commander to find out if gunships were on station and if a security force was in place around the downed aircraft.

Once having arrived at the location of the downed aircraft, the recovery team flew over the area to get a visual on the condition of the aircraft, and terrain features. One can only imagine the number of places than an aircraft would and could go down.

After all this was settled, we then began our approach to the recovery scene. Once we landed on the ground, the Huey would either leave or shut down away from the downed aircraft after discharging the rigging crew. If Pipesmoke had to leave the area, usually one crewman stayed with the pilots, except on the rare occasions when all four crewmen were needed on the ground. The ground crew had no radios, and at times had to use hand signals or pop smoke. If possible, radio contact was used to let the pilots know we had finished the actual rigging, and the downed aircraft was ready to be pulled out by a CH-47 Chinook (a.k.a.: Hook or Shit-Hook). It was only after several recovery crew members were wounded that we were issued side arms. Up until that time we had no weapons with us, except those on our aircraft, consisting of two M-60 machine guns, and one M-1 carbine.

Rigging the aircraft required a variety of equipment, tools, and at times a lot of improvising. We carried a sand bag full of cargo straps (6), a hook from a tow truck, a homemade pin that fit over the "Jesus Nut," and secured that to the homemade hook that finished the task and allowed a strap from the Hook to grab the downed aircraft. Once the strap from the Hook was hooked up, the two crew members exited the top of the aircraft and moved to the side to make sure the recovery went well. After the aircraft was removed, the recovery craft returned to pick up the crew members. If the aircraft was damaged due to a crash, then we had to revert to a more drastic procedure to rig for extraction. This might involve removing the main rotor blades, using an axe to chop of the tail boom, wrapping two specially made straps around the entire body, placing parts in the Hook, or a meuss apparatus, in other words, picking up all the pieces and removing them from the site. This type of recovery required quite a bit of time and knowledge in rigging. It took a lot of brainpower and muscle to accomplish this task. If the aircraft was damaged to this extent, we flew it back to the "Bone Yard."

Once the CH-47 had lifted out of the downed aircraft, Pipesmoke would follow and monitor the load, staying in constant radio contact with the pilots in Hook and vice-versa. If a problem developed with the load, we would land and correct it or notify battalion that there was a problem and to be ready to make adjustments when the Hook arrived. Once on the ground, we reversed the procedure and turned the aircraft over to the home unit or repair facility.

One of the most interesting missions of my tour with Pipesmoke was escorting the Black Widows on their move from Dau Tieng to Phu Hiep. I had only been on recovery for a short time when this mission was assigned to me and one other member of the recovery team. This was an extremely rewarding trip for me, flying with the 188<sup>th</sup> in formation along the beautiful Eastern coastline of Vietnam where the rugged coast meets the crystal clear, aqua blue waters of the South China Sea. I had never flown in this type of tactical formation. After arriving in Phu Hiep, we were flown back to Phu Loi in a CH-47.

There was also another recovery that stood out and that was the recovery of the 188<sup>th</sup>'s new CO, Major Jack O. Johnson, when his aircraft went down. What made this recovery stand out was the fact that we had to double sling about 125 feet of strap from the Shit-Hook to the hook on top of his helicopter. In other words, this aircraft went down in the middle of Indian country and was resting a long way down in the jungle. When we had the chance to, we left our calling card by using a stencil with the words "RECOVERED BY PIPESMOKE" painted in white somewhere on the downed aircraft we recovered.

Source: Thomas M. Oakley — "Pipesmoke 69"

## **Food and the Deputy MACV Commander**

When Major Jack O. Johnson took command of the 188<sup>th</sup>, he had just arrived from the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB at Cu Chi, which had all the food they wanted and even ice cream on a regular basis. The first thing Johnson realized when he went to the mess hall was that the 188<sup>th</sup> was eating some pretty bad rations because they were the last priority for food from the 25<sup>th</sup> Division Resupply Point. He knew that there was food going to waste in Saigon, but the problem was how to get it to our troops.

There was a supply officer available to send to Saigon, so away he went with a jeep, trailer, and radio. His job was to expedite any of our regular supply requisitions, and to gather up as much fresh food as he could. Each night when our aircraft were released from other missions, usually Ash & Trash supply runs for units all around Saigon, they would check in by radio and if anything was ready for pick-up, they would stop at Helipad H-3 and load it up.

One evening a Black Widow was loading potatoes when the Deputy Commander, General Abrams, landed at H-3. He went over to the BW aircraft and over the shoulder of the crew chief asked him what he was doing. The Crew Chief told him about our plan for getting goodies to Dau Tieng and, as you could guess, the shit hit the fan.

Someone from Abrams' office called 269<sup>th</sup> Commander, Jim Merryman, who in turn called the 188<sup>th</sup> Commander and BW6 was in front of Black Baron 6's desk at Cu Chi with heels locked. Merryman ordered a stop to our operation by telling us to stop loading at H-3 — so we did.

The supply officer was ordered to keep up the food operation, but move the pick-up point so that we could obey Merryman's orders, but not stop the food supply to Dau Tieng. In fact, Major Johnson did disobey orders "To stop this food run business," but he obeyed the battalion commander's order to "stop using H-3." We ate pretty good until we moved from Dau Tieng to LZ Sally in March of 1968 and

then it was back to C-rations and canned food from WWII. Some time years later, it came out that the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB stationed an officer and jeep in Saigon and did the same thing as the 188<sup>th</sup> had done from December to March of 67-68.

Source: Jack O. Johnson, Cmdr 188<sup>th</sup>, Dec - Jun, '67 - '68

## **B-36, Bo Gritz and Cambodia**

About ten days after Maj Johnson took command of the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC, the company received a mission to support B-36 of the Army 5th Special Forces commanded by a Captain named Bo Gritz. The 188<sup>th</sup> moved a platoon of aircraft along with a heavy fire team and the C&C ship over to Tay Ninh East Airfield where we set up a tent camp consisting of about 100 Cambodian mercenary forces commanded by a group of US Special Forces. Their task was to field 6 to 8 man patrols across the border in Cambodia in the fishhook area of Base Areas 354, 353 and 707 in an effort to gain intelligence about movements in the area. They were to capture POW's and bring back documents if possible, but not become too deeply engaged with any foe that we could not withdraw them quickly when they made contact.

BW6 would take the command group out in the C&C aircraft late in the afternoon and while at altitude, usually 3,000 to 4,000 feet, we would recon for single ship LZ's for the next days insertion. We would never circle around or make more than one pass along the border or over the area we were reconning in order to not give away our intentions. Then we would fly back to Tay Ninh East and prepare for the next day's operation. This meant that the C&C had one shot at locating the LZ's and identifying land marks that would be used to guide the aircraft the next morning; at first light, when we would insert the patrol.

The plan of insertion was to load 4 or 5 people in the lead slick followed by a gunship with 4 or 5 more people in the second slick followed by a gunship. All of the lift ships and gunships would be in a long single file separated by several hundred yards. The C&C would fly in at 1500 feet and the lift ships would be on the tree tops when we approached the LZ. BW6 would give voice directions over the radio ..... like a GCA approach and guide the aircraft into the LZ. He would count down a deceleration approach and as the first ship flared hard into a zero airspeed decent into a single ship hole in the woods, the following gunship would over fly the LZ. As soon as the first lift was on the ground they would pull out as quick as they could allowing the second lift ship to flare and descend into the LZ with the second gunship over flying them as they unloaded and pulled out ASAP. The single file of aircraft would give the impression that there was just a daisy chain of aircraft that went by to anyone standing on the ground and not directly in the LZ. The insertions were all done at first light and black out using no landing or running lights as we went into the LZ. Once the team was on the ground, a quick radio check would be done and if the team wasn't in immediate contact we would leave the area.

A-361 and A-362 would be covered by a FAC aircraft, usually an L-19, flying radio relay and if the team needed extraction or gunship support, the FAC was their life line. The teams also had Tac Air and artillery available for the most of areas we went into. Many times the radio communications would be a whisper of "OK" or if there were indications of enemy being close the click of a microphone button would respond and that would break the squelch on our radios telling us danger was near.

Several times we would put a team in and then have to pull them out almost immediately. If we had to pull them out without going back into a suitable LZ all of our lift ships had "Maguire" rigs which were ropes hooked up to the cargo rings on the floor of the lift ship and we could haul out 4 people from jungle that was up to 100 feet deep. Most of the time the patrol would be inserted without contact and then they would move out for several days of reconning.

One morning as the aircraft approached an LZ some NVA trooper shot straight up at our aircraft as we passed over them. The LZ we were going into was about 100 yards beyond this position, so we went right on with the landing and after the lift was on the ground the chase was on. They went after him and later that day we pulled him out as a POW along with his AK-47.

We had several days when the patrol would find major base camps and bunker complexes indicating the presence of major troop units and headquarters. One patrol attacked a major bunker complex and succeeded in over running it. They were gathering up documents, maps and anything else that looked interesting and trying to set up a hasty retreat. The NVA were buzzing around all over the area and we were receiving fire from all around the camp the SF's had uncovered. They fought their way back down a trail until we got them into an LZ big enough to land two aircraft and get everyone out at once. In this case, if we couldn't get everyone out in one lift the ones left on the ground would have surely been wiped out. The team was backing out, blowing claymores to cover their withdrawal and we were putting fire down from all of the gunships plus the door gunners in the slicks. The team came out with several duffel bags of documents and maps and a bunch of very P.O.'ed bad guys right on their tail. We loaded the team and just got them out before the LZ turned into a hell hole.

Not all of the operations were a one sided success and on one day we took a bunch of casualties. The SF's had four or five killed and we had one of our aircraft shot down with 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt leader CPT Doht hit in the head. We were very fortunate to be able to get enough force on the ground to relieve the team that was pinned down and we were able to get everyone out. We had at least two helicopter crew men that had to be evaced to the States because of their wounds. (See story entitled: "Rapid Fire and the Black Widows")

During the mission the Special Forces members of team A-361 and A-362 presented each and every Black Widow a Red, White and Blue neck scarf that they wore when they were not out in the boonies on a mission. History has recorded that Bo Gritz became the best known Special Forces trooper to come out of Vietnam. They are a special group of fighters and we were very proud to have had the opportunity to support them in a very difficult and dangerous mission.

Source: Jack O. Johnson, CO 188<sup>th</sup> AHC, Dec 67 - Jun 68

## **Rapid Fire and the Black Widows**

From August 1967 onwards, the mission of strategic and tactical reconnaissance in the II and III Corps Tactical Zones was the responsibility of Special Forces Provisional Detachment B-36. Organized by Major James G. Gritz as Project Rapid Fire and located at Long Hai, B-36 comprised two A-detachment Mobile Guerrilla Force units (A-361 and A-362) twenty Army long-range patrol personnel, two Cambodian Mike Force companies (FREECAMBODIA) and one camp security company.

Project Rapid Fire reconnaissance teams would be inserted by helicopter in designated areas, to seek out the enemy and report on their movements. Usually a number of simulated insertions would be made, to try to confuse any enemy observers. Helicopter gunships would stand by in case of trouble and an Air Force FAC would usually be on call nearby. B-36 also had its own quick-reaction companies back at base, to be dispatched immediately if a team were compromised and needed reinforcements. Usually the recon teams were inserted and extracted without problems, but on occasion all hell would let loose. One such occasion is described in an after-action report written by a Black Widow 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt crew involved during Project Rapid Fire V.

On the morning of 4 January 1968, the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company was involved in operations in support of Special Forces Detachment B-36. Nine "Black Widow" aircraft were assigned to Tay Ninh East to assist B-36 in counter-insurgency operations over a thirty-day period. On that day B-36 had planned to insert two ambush patrols in the vicinity of coordinates XT113965 (LZ Rosie) and XT088881 (LZ Nora). The Black Widow ships lifted off at 0620 hours from Tay Ninh East, with a full load of troops, and proceeded to the two areas that had been designated for troop insertions. The objective of the mission was to attempt to acquire prisoners and documents.

First light found the Black Widow ships approaching the indicated LZ's. Two aircraft inserted their troops into LZ Rosie and two others inserted their troops into LZ Nora. After completing the insertion, the flight returned to Tay Ninh for refueling and then proceeded to Trai Be to stand by for further instructions.

The ground troops in LZ Nora became engaged in fierce and heavy fighting with an enemy force of unknown size. They found themselves surrounded, and the ground commander radioed for an immediate emergency insertion of reinforcements. Two Black Widow aircraft returned to Tay Ninh East and picked up the needed additional troops, while the rest of the flight proceeded to the embattled LZ. The three Black Widow gunships began assisting the ground troops, making numerous gun runs, and two aircraft orbited the area waiting to pick up wounded personnel. Still another Black Widow aircraft, the command and control ship, orbited overhead the hard-hit patrol, directing and coordinating the other Black Widow ships. The two aircraft containing reinforcements arrived at LZ Nora and inserted their troops, then returned to Trai Be with the rest of the Black Widow flight until the area could be secured.

While shut down at Trai Be, the two aircraft that had inserted troops into the LZ related to the rest of the flight that they had received small-arms fire from the south side of the LZ, and Captain Dohrt requested gunships suppression on the suspected enemy positions. The door gunners on the two slicks were also instructed to suppress the suspected area on departure. After landing in the LZ and the casualties were loaded aboard, both ships came to a hover, did a pedal turn and attempted to depart the LZ.

Aircraft number 16205 received several hits and the aircraft commander CWO Richard "Dusty" Rhodes radioed that he was going down with partial power. Aircraft number 16122 followed the aircraft down and saw it hit the ground and roll onto its right side. Without hesitation, Captain Dohrt and Warrant Officer Jones landed their aircraft near the downed aircraft and deployed all able-bodied men aboard their ship to set up a perimeter defense around the aircraft. While on the ground, Captain Dohrt's crew learned that Specialist Fourth Class Newcomer, the downed aircraft's gunner, had been pinned beneath the aircraft. Captain Dohrt and Warrant Officer Jones took immediate action in an attempt to free the trapped gunner. A rope was attached to the downed aircraft and aircraft 16122 attempted to raise it enough to allow Newcomer to be pulled from beneath the aircraft.

The rope broke and the first attempt was a failure. Another attempt was initiated, only this time two ropes were used. Specialists Fourth Class Wingerd and Matthes displayed extraordinary professionalism in guiding and directing the pilots while they were attempting to raise the downed aircraft. The attempt appeared to be successful until the pinned man began to experience great pain and the attempt had to be aborted. Both crews knew that the entire area was infested with NVA soldiers and yet, when ordered by command and control to leave the man beneath the aircraft, Specialist Charlebois asked for five more minutes in which to free Newcomer and was granted the time.

While the attempts to lift the aircraft were in progress, another aircraft had landed and left a man on the ground before taking off again. This man, Specialist Dennis M. Wolfe, had requested his pilot to let him stay on the ground and assist the others in the rescue effort. The men knew they must work quickly if they were to free the pinned man. The only hope was brute strength. Wolfe and Charlebois physically lifted the aircraft for WO Tollefsen, who had gotten inside the aircraft with WO Rhodes to pull Newcomer from beneath the aircraft. The four men carried him to aircraft 16122 and all those still on the ground boarded 16122 and returned to the 45<sup>th</sup> Medical Evacuation Hospital in Tay Ninh West.

After refueling, Captain Dohrt and his crew returned to the scene of the operation and found that the area around the downed aircraft had been secured by additional troops and that all the troops in LZ Nora had been extracted. The command and control ship told Captain Dohrt to proceed to LZ Rosie, orbit and await further orders to extract the troops. The immediate area surrounding LZ Rosie was reported to be secure, although the unit had been in contact earlier, which prompted their extraction. The ground commander requested his men be extracted and the Black Widow aircraft were told to enter the pickup zone one at a time. Captain Dohrt and his crew were the first to enter the LZ. The approach was made to an area which, at some time during the morning, had burned. As the aircraft neared the ground, it became engulfed in ashes and went into IFR conditions. Skillfully, Warrant Officer Jones lowered the aircraft to the ground. The ashes cleared and the friendly troops were approaching the aircraft, when, without warning, the aircraft came under heavy enemy ground fire and was struck left rear of the fuselage by an RPG round. Both pilots went into action immediately and attempted to get the ship off the ground, only to have the r.p.m. bleed off to 4,000 before the ship was two feet in the air. The RPG round had caused the loss of all cyclic control and only through luck was the aircraft settled back on the ground without rolling over. Although already having sustained multiple shrapnel wounds from the RPG round, Specialist Wingerd jumped from his seat and proceeded to Captain Dohrt's door in an attempt to get the Captain out of the ship. Just as Specialist Wingerd was about to open the door, another RPG round hit the left skid, one and one half feet aft of the forward cross tube. The explosion knocked Wingerd to the ground, seriously wounding him. Captain Dohrt, realizing the seriousness of the situation, quickly departed his seat, exited between the seats and instructed Specialist Matthes to dismount his machine gun and take up a defensive position outside the aircraft. Captain Dohrt then proceeded to make his way, still under heavy fire, to the friendly position of some fifty feet away. (Captain Dohrt should have stayed with his crew. However, he was ex-Special Forces and instinctively went to their aid.

Author.)

Back at the aircraft WO Jones was attempting to get out of his door when an enemy weapon pinpointed him and began to fire. Bullets flew everywhere, six coming within a fraction of an inch of hitting WO Jones. Exiting between the seats and jumping out of the left cargo door, WO Jones directed his first thoughts to his critically wounded crew chief. He knelt next to Specialist Wingerd, protected only by the suppressive fire being provided by Specialist Matthes. Unable to move Wingerd, WO Jones relieved Matthes of his M-60 and instructed him of apply first aid to Wingerd. Although the entire area was still under heavy enemy ground fire, Matthes made his way back to the ship from his machine gun position and, undaunted by the bullets spanking the ground all around him, climbed back on board the ship to retrieve a first aid kit.

Bullet after bullet whined by Specialist Matthes as he went to the side of his fallen comrade. Matthes proceeded to apply first aid until a Special Forces man came out to their position in the middle of the open LZ. The Special Forces man and WO Jones decided to provide suppressive fire while Matthes carried Wingerd to the friendly position. Picking Wingerd up was not an easy job for Matthes as Wingerd outweighed him by seventy pounds. Falling several times en route to the friendly position, Matthes continually returned to his feet and pushed onward, carrying Wingerd to the safety of the tree-line. At that point the friendly force of twelve had four to five dead and six wounded.

After both members of his crew had made their way safely to the friendly position, WO Jones and the Special Forces soldier stopped their covering fire and dashed to the tree-line. As soon as he had made it to the tree-line, WO Jones went to check on Wingerd's condition and found Matthes in need of more bandages to check the bleeding. Going from man to man, up and down the tree-line, WO Jones found the needed bandages and returned to the wounded man.

Captain Doht, in the meantime, had returned to the area behind the aircraft to assist the other soldiers wounded by the RPG round and subsequent enemy fire. While aiding the wounded men, completely unprotected from enemy fire, Captain Doht received a bullet in the left side of his head. (During this time, WO Jones thought that they were about to be overrun and that he would not make it out. He wondered what his relatives back home were doing at that moment and figured out that they were probably having breakfast...Author.)

Back in the tree-line, WO Jones manned his M-60 and helped Matthes to comfort and apply first aid to Wingerd until several "Robin Hood" aircraft arrived with reinforcements. Shortly thereafter a medevac aircraft arrived and WO Jones and Matthes carried Wingerd to the Aircraft, searching unsuccessfully for Captain Doht on the way. Another medevac aircraft arrived and the two men helped to carry the other wounded to the ship. The area was still very "hot" so both men took up defensive positions until more reinforcements were inserted into the area. A Robin Hood aircraft then landed and picked up both WO Jones and Specialist Matthes and took them to Katum, where WO Jones learned that Captain Doht was still alive. The valorous actions of the crews brought about the accomplishment of the evacuation of the pinned gunner and all casualties.

The foregoing after-action report was to be submitted with a recommendation for several medals for the participants, but owing to operational requirements it was not submitted in time and nothing came of it. Warrant Officer George Jones survived the rest of his year in combat and is now the Senior Rotary Wing Captain of the Colgate Palmolive Company in New Jersey. He has in his possession the mangled back end of one of the RPG's which hit his aircraft, removed from the wreck after its recovery by CH-47 to Cu Chi.

## The Letter

The Commander had to deal with the reality and disheartening duty of writing letters to the parents of any Black Widow who was killed or wounded in action. . . or otherwise. The following letter was written during Operation Rapid Fire V to Bert Wingerd after his son SP/4 Tim Wingerd was severely wounded in action.

Tim Wingerd and his wife were visiting relatives in Oklahoma City during the summer of 2000. He called his old commander, LTC Jack O. Johnson, and set a date for lunch in Lawton, Oklahoma when Tim and his wife were on their way home to Texas from Oklahoma. During lunch, Tim pulled a red and blue striped airmail envelope out of a folder and asked his old boss if he remembered this letter. It was the letter that is reprinted below which Tim's dad had saved and passed on to Tim later after he got back into the States. Tim provided a copy of this letter to be used in the history project.

17 January 1968

Dear Mr. Wingerd,

I'm sorry Tim's letter came as such a shock, but Tim had signed what is called a lightly wounded slip which prevents us from notifying anyone if he is wounded and is not serious. Tim was wounded on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January while performing duty as a crew chief on an assault in the area North of Tay Ninh, RVN. His aircraft was struck with a rocket as it sat on the ground while loading troops. Tim was struck with fragments from the rocket, which resulted in a wound on the right jaw, the fracture of the right jaw and right arm, plus some minor wounds in the legs. I was with Tim from the time he arrived at the hospital until he came out of surgery. He required some work to align his jaw and close two wounds along his jaw line. These both came out beautifully. The arm is a simple fracture, but will prevent him from writing since it is in a cast. The fracture of the jaw required that the doctor wire his teeth together in order to hold it stationary which makes talking difficult, but not impossible. Tim came through all the operations beautifully and was in both good spirits and humor when I saw him yesterday.

Tim will require some time to mend; however, the doctor assured me the last time I talked to him that he would make a full and complete recovery. He will have two small scars on the right side of his face by the jaw line. These will disappear later...I'm sure. As I said, I'm sorry I could not write before because of the regulation which stopped me. I can assure you Tim will be all right and should be in the States before too long.

I want to take this opportunity to say how pleased and proud I was to have Tim a member of my company. He was far and above one of the best crew chiefs I had. He is an outstanding example of young American manhood; you have every right to be extremely proud of your son. He was a definite asset to this organization, and I miss his contribution to the operation of this company. If all the young men I had met Tim's level of responsibility, the future of America will be in good hands. I hope this will relieve your mind and put you at ease. If I can be of further assistance, feel free to write to me. My address is:

Major Jack O. Johnson 077484  
188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company  
APO San Francisco, 96268

Yours truly,  
Jack O. Johnson  
Major, Artillery  
Commanding

### **More on Rapid Fire V**

This information was compiled from After Action Reports, National Archive documents and witness statements. There is also a description of actions taken during Picnic II, conducted during Rapid Fire V. The 188<sup>th</sup> had a resupply helicopter (piloted by WO Dusty Rhodes) go down with no casualties and the helicopter was recovered. Picnic II lasted over 7 hours as indicated in the attached captured documents. It was a large base area. From the 11<sup>th</sup> of December up to 7 January 1968 they treated over 287 patients at this location. Unit ID's are included in the typed description of the contact.

It is not well known that in nine months B-36 had 13 killed, 5 evacuated (100% disabled), and many others wounded with an operational force of U.S. at less than 44 — that is heavy casualties.

### **Rapid Fire V — War Zone C — Dec 7<sup>th</sup> Through Jan 24<sup>th</sup>, 1968**

Recon and ambush patrols were conducted during this period. On 30 December 1967, a patrol consisting of Cahill, Burr, Newman, Grant, Sgt. Maj. Hillman, and seven Cambodians ambushed a five man enemy unit. Jimmy Cahill was the right flank security, when one of the bodies moved, Cahill shot one, wounding him, then fired off his claymore killing the rest. We had one POW and captured weapons and documents. One of the units identified was the 141<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment. On 3 January 1967, a recon patrol was re-enforced because enemy commo wire had been discovered. The patrol's mission now was to tap the wire. A device was used to intercept any commo coming over the wire. Sgt. Wallace Handwork commanded the patrol. Sometime during the morning of January 4<sup>th</sup>, an enemy security patrol checking the wire discovered the patrol and a firefight ensued. Two Americans were killed and two wounded. Handwork called for the Spiders. A reaction force was soon airborne and inserted into the LZ. Patrick Martin, a member of the relief force, killed two enemy on the edge of the LZ. The relief force moved into the jungle, linked up with Handwork, and carried the wounded and dead back to the LZ. After all the wounded and dead had been removed, a second patrol from B-36 was engaged further to the North. Helicopter #16/22 was hit extracting a patrol with a POW. On Stark's patrol, Tabodia was killed, Stark lost a portion of both legs, the helicopter pilot, Captain Doherty, was also hit in the eye. A couple of crew members, Wingerd on #122 and Newcomer on #205 were wounded. Members of that patrol were: Ruiz, Patterson, Stark, Tabodia, Hooper, Miller, and eight Cambodians.

Because of the wire, it was decided to put another patrol in the area west of where the wire was discovered. The patrol was inserted close to the Son Vamp Dog, a river that separates Cambodia from Vietnam. The patrol went in on a Sunday morning at approximately 0800 on 7 January 1968. The mission was dubbed Picnic II. Less than 75 meters into the jungle, the patrol made contact and over ran two to three bunkers; they were not fighting positions. The patrol then came under heavy fire from the enemy. We engaged those bunkers with 66 mm light anti-tank weapons. The Spiders were soon on station providing support fire. It soon became evident that we were receiving 360-degree fire. The enemy on the Cambodian side of the border engaged us with small arms and automatic weapons. We tucked into a tight perimeter. I informed the TOC that we already had four enemy rucksacks full of documents. We had initially hit the commo bunker and, from the looks of the captured documents, their operations center. Somehow, through pure luck, we had landed inside their perimeter. The Spiders engaged about a platoon size force attempting to move across the LZ we had landed in. Smokey the FAC now had an air strike going in. The first strike was 500 lb bombs. They dropped them about 250 meters northeast of us. A visual recon by Smokey reported a large base area with trench lines connecting the different areas. The patrol now had five wounded and one dead. Smokey continued to put in the air strikes. The Spiders hit the Cambodian side of the river. II Field Force supplied a fourteen helicopter lift to put A-362 on the ground. A-362 landed at approximately 1015 and began moving to re-enforce. They were hit with withering fire. The Black Widows now were picking up the Special Forces III Corp mike force. They were inserted alongside A-362. In the mean time, a resupply helicopter dropping ammo into the patrol was hit by ground fire and went down. (St. Laurent was on that helicopter. It was secured with no casualties.) The enemy was still delivering heavy fire on both the patrol and the relief elements. By this time, Smokey had put in three air strikes. His last call to me was, "Marauder, I have one last bird on station; it has napalm." I called 362 and the Mike force and instructed them to smoke the forward edge of their line. Fifty meters separated the patrol from the relief forces. The second napalm strike did the job. Link up was accomplished. The documents that were captured included the Standard Signal Instruction, Standard Operating Instructions, crypto, training schedules, base camp locations, a roster of people, the number of cases treated by their dispensary, and the name and locations of units. Their training schedule indicated Sunday was a training holiday. Extracting the force started at 1630 hours. We had been in contact for over seven hours. The patrol from A-361 was: Newman, Martin, Burr, Handwork, Aiello, Grant, and fourteen Cambodians. Martin, Aiello, Burr and Grant were wounded. Five Cambodians were wounded; one Cambodian was killed.



According to the initial read out, the patrol had hit the headquarters of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Rear Service Group along with the U-80 Training Regiment. From the documents and the POW's captured on 30 December, the 141 VC Regiment was mentioned. It is not known if they were around on 7 January. If they were involved in that base camp, it is not known. The crypto information was deemed so valuable that it was evacuated from the Combined Documentation Exploitation Center to the National Security Agency in the United States. There were over eighty pounds of documents taken out.

### **More Details on the Picnic II Operation**

MEMO: REF. Peter Medary Stark

There are inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the After Action Report on Patrol 24, 4 January 1968 that is reflected in General Order 2681. It might be why Pete did not get the MOH.

I sent Pete a copy of the After Action Report. We discussed it in detail via telephone. According to Stark, the fourteen man patrol infiltrated, moved into the jungle, and established an ambush on a well-used trail. The patrol did not encounter bunkers, etc. Pete was in the kill zone and armed with the silent Stein gun. Three individuals entered the kill zone. Pete fired and wounded one. The After Action Report describes what happened to the rest of the enemy.

The prisoner was secured. Pete started an IV solution on the POW, gave him morphine, and applied first aid to the wound. According to Pete, the right security was not under fire. Tabodia and Pete were carrying the POW and stopped at the edge of the LZ. As the helicopter made its approach, Pete, Tabodia, the POW, and three indig. were assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Chopper, #16122. When they got along side of the chopper, Pete and Tabodia started to load the POW in. It was around this time that the helicopter was hit by a B-40. Both of Stark's legs were mangled, and one foot was blown off. Pete tied tourniquets to both of his legs and began to treat the wounded. The helicopter tried to life off, but went down about thirty meters from Pete, Tabodia, the POW, and the three indig. The second helicopter aborted and the rest of the patrol returned to the wood line about thirty meters from Pete. Pete and his group were in the open at the mercy of the enemy automatic and semi-automatic weapon fire.

By this time Pete was working on Tabodia after having already treated the others. Captain Doht, the helicopter commander, rushed over to assist Pete and was hit in the eye. Stark, attempting to use the hemostat to clamp off an artery on Tabodia, directed the wounded Captain to the remainder of the patrol in the wood line. Aiello and Morrison were on the reaction force. Aiello told me he wasn't immediately aware of how badly Pete was hit. Pete was telling him to get Tabodia, the POW and Doht out on the first Med-Evac. Pete told me he did not remember much after Doht was hit.

The After Action Report under d (1) has one indig. being killed and two USSF wounded. That is Pete and Tabodia. Under paragraph F(1), (a), they list one USSF killed and one indig. Again in paragraph F, (1), (1,b) they list two USSF wounded. The only wounded were Pete and Tabodia. Tabodia bled to death on the LZ or en route to the hospital. The same paragraph states that three aircrew were wounded, not two (Doht, Wingered, Newcomer).

General Order 2681 does not have Pete putting tourniquets on his legs first. The General Order also has another soldier assisting Pete. There was no other soldier. Captain Doht did attempt to assist Pete, but he was wounded. Patterson is listed as administering first aid to the wounded. Patterson was in the tree line along with Ruiz, Hooper, Miller, and the rest of the indig. Patterson might have assisted Captain Doht after Stark sent him out of the line of fire to join the rest of the patrol in the tree line. Pete was the only one, according to Aiello and Morrison, who was on the open LZ treating the wounded. As you can see by the After Action Report, the POW died at the hospital.

As far as Pete getting the DSC and not the MOH, I believe I know what happened. Handwork's patrol was hit just before Pete's. Handwork had two dead, Simmons and Taylor. The enemy did bring the flank security of this patrol under fire. The reaction force went in and pulled that patrol out. Handwork also had a few wounded. Pete Stark's patrol was hit during the extraction of this patrol. After Pete's patrol was extracted, there were four debriefings taking place, two patrol and two reaction forces. The reaction force debriefing for Pete's patrol should have been mission 24A. It is not in the After Action Report. If you notice, Mission 25 took place, DTG 031530, a day before Mission 24. The After Action Reports are out of order.

On 7 January 1968, a patrol from A-361 was inserted west of where Handwork's patrol made contact. Handwork on his patrol had an attachment assigned from the Army Security Agency (SFC Toten or Totten). Later, the Army Radio Research Unit. He was tapping enemy commo wire when Handwork's patrol was hit. The mission on 7 January was to locate the origin of the wire. On 7 January 1968 the patrol, later renamed Picnic II, made contact with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Read Service Headquarters and the U-80 Training Regiment. By the completion of the mission, over two hundred men were on the ground. Team SGT Wolf, of A-362 was wounded. He went back to the States. Wolf would have been the one taking care of the awards and decorations for 362. Captain DeJohn, Rear Area Commander, was relieved and then Tet came along. The eyewitness statements were there for Pete, but someone thought the entire patrol was in one location. They were not. Patterson was not assisting Pete.

I believe whoever drafted the proposed citation did so from fragmentary statements. One other thing, the writer of the DSC does not use the word "kill zone" or "ambush," but uses "trap." That is not a military term. Added to all this confusion, the Tet offensive, B-36 has a change of command in late January or early February; Gritz left and Walker took over. All these factors played a roll in Pete being awarded a DSC. Pete was never recommended for the MOH.

In a conversation with Miller, he stated they tried to get to Pete, but the fire from the enemy was so intense that movement was impossible.

Source: Bernie Newman, B-36 Special Forces.

**Bulletin No. 8851 Captured Documents — Hospital Information**

CDEC Doc Log No.		Summary			Capture Data
		<p>Document further reveals that the average number of patients receiving medical treatment at the Dispensary on any given day was 139 men.</p> <p>Item 4. Patients Status Report reveals that during December 1967, a total of 351 patients received medical treatment at the Convalescence [Camp of Doan 80C] including 123 men evacuated to this Convalescence [Camp] from Units 7, 8, 10 and 11 in December 1967 as follows:</p>			
Date	Number of Patients Evacuated in December 1967	Total Number of Patients Received Treatment	Number of Patients Released in December 1967	Number of Patients Evacuated to Other Hospitals	Number of Patients Under Med Treatment as of the end of December 1967
7	13	98	25		73
8	41	83	14		69
10	1	74		8	66
11	38	36	16	1	79
Totals	93	351	55	9	287
		<p>Document further reports that the average number of patients receiving medical treatment at the Convalescence [Camp] on any given day was 276 men.</p>			

# CU CHI

READY TO STRIKE...  
ANY WHERE ANY TIME



## SMOKEY BARON

In June of 1967 the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion (CAB), in the conduct of airmobile operations, realized a need for the screening effects offered by an aircraft converted to dispense smoke. Initially smoke ships were requested from the 11<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 145<sup>th</sup> CAB's. The Little Bears of A Company, 25<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion named their smoke ship, Smokey the Bear. Under the guidance of Major Jack McKnight, the 269<sup>th</sup> converted a UH-1C huey, tail number 66-14152, into Smokey Baron I (call sign Smokey), by installing a 53E00-62A smoke dispensing system. The Maltese Cross of the 269<sup>th</sup> was used as the nose art and the artist decided to add "the" to Smokey Baron. Because of the size of the system tanks Smokey did not have the smoke oil capacity to remain on station for any longer than thirty minutes, not enough time to cover a large operation going into separate Landing Zones (LZ). A slow speed of 60 knots provided the best coverage but increased the vulnerability of Smokey and its crew. A faster approach tended to dispense the smoke in lower density, thereby decreasing Smokey's effectiveness but also decreasing its vulnerability.

In the fall of 1967 Major Jack McKnight and Captain Matt Kambrod were flying Smokey for that day's mission. On this particular day they got the shit shot out of them. The impacting rounds hit everything, including knocking out the instruments. They made an emergency landing at Cu Chi and as Captain Kambrod pulled up on the collective to touch down the mast split in two. The rotor sailed several hundred feet away, landing in the motor pool. The huey, without a rotor, dropped directly to the ground. Inside the huey, Major McKnight and Captain Kambrod were unaware that they had lost their rotor and before getting out, Jack jumped on Matt for what he perceived to be a very hard landing. Neither man drank but on that night they made an exception. The next day Major McKnight went looking for Smokey Baron II. Both smoke ships were given top priority by maintenance and nothing was spared in keeping them flyable. Smokey Baron was the battalion's secret weapon and a Godsend for the grunts and air crews.

On numerous occasions when officers in battalion headquarters were not busy they, and Captain Matt Kambrod or Major Jack McKnight would sneak off and fly Smokey on that day's mission. Prior to providing smoke for a 188<sup>th</sup> operation close to the Cambodian border the Smokey Baron boys (as they referred to themselves) landed at the WEB (188<sup>th</sup> airfield), which was located at (Camp Rainier) Dau Tieng, base camp of the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. The crew consisted of LTC James Merryman, Major Jack McKnight, crew chief SP/5 Phillip Busby and door gunner SP/5 Paul Geving.

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968, a week before the battalion XO, Major Irv "Davie" Cockett was to replace LTC Merryman as the new Commander of the 269<sup>th</sup>, he along with his crew chief, SP/5 Nichols were wounded. Major Cockett was wounded severely in the foot and evacuated back to the states. Major Cockett was one of only two men seriously wounded while flying on Smokey Baron from May 1967 through January 1968. They were hit while flying Smokey Baron II during the 188<sup>th</sup>'s Operation Rapid Fire V in support of B-36 teams A-361 and A-362 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group. Prior to this, Smokey received few rounds in the cockpit but needed a lot of new tail booms. The VC and NVA never learned to lead the target.

Initially Smokey was used as a screening device in the assault phase of an airmobile operation. The smoke screen emitted by Smokey served as a visual barrier between the suspected Viet Cong (VC) or North Vietnamese Army (NVA) locations and the approaching flight, denying the enemy clear fields of fire and reduced the danger of incoming fire to the flight crews. It was imperative for Smokey to stay in close radio contact with the gunship fire teams that provided close in fire support for Smokey's smoke runs. A visual reconnaissance of the planned LZ, although not necessary, was beneficial prior to any smoke run. Whenever possible, the 269<sup>th</sup>, under the scrutiny of the Command and Control (C&C) ship, had Smokey reconnoiter the area with gunship cover prior to any Combat Assault (CA). After being briefed on the location of the LZ, the flight direction of the airmobile force, the suspected enemy location and the area the ground commander and the air mission commander wanted screened, Smokey would return to the Release Point (RP), orbit and wait for the arrival of the incoming flight of slicks (UH-1H troop carrier). Usually the lead gunship would mark the LZ with the color of the day. When the 269<sup>th</sup> Pathfinder Detachment, "Cavaliers" were used to mark an LZ or PZ (Pickup Zone) they would pop smoke at both ends of the LZ or PZ. When the lead pilot called for smoke a pathfinder would pop smoke at the first touch down point and five seconds later another pathfinder would pop smoke just beyond the last touchdown point.

On the approach to the LZ Smokey would position itself abeam to the lead ship. After coordinating with the gun team leader, Smokey would descend to ground level and be in position for the smoke run. Timed just ahead of the fight and just behind the lead gunship, Smokey would lay down a dense smoke screen.

The 269<sup>th</sup> Area of Operation (AO) included the Crescent, the Razor Backs, the Michelin rubber plantation, Ben Cui rubber plantation, Nui Ba Den, the Mushroom, the Trapezoid, Boi Loi Woods, Ho Bo Woods and the Iron Triangle to mention a few. During operations into these enemy sanctuaries the 269<sup>th</sup> always received heavy enemy fire. When Smokey was used on several operations into the Iron Triangle, not once did the flight receive fire but there were instances when the flight would receive fire from the unscreened side of the LZ. Once that lesson was learned both sides of the LZ were smoked. You always had to take into consideration the direction of the wind, otherwise Smokey would end up smoking the friendly troops that had been dropped off in the LZ. The infantry commander's used Smokey in a diversionary role by sealing off the periphery of any hamlet located on the approach path of the inbound flight. It was intended to divert the attention of the enemy, creating the question of the exact location of the LZ. The smoke screen hampered the vision of the enemy forces positioned in and along the tree lines surrounding the hamlet on the final approach. Smokey added security to the entire flight and gave the flight crews a psychological boost. Smokey Baron I and II saved many of the flight crews from being wounded or killed during CA's in the western III Corps AO. Timed right, the smoke screen created a visual shield between the slicks and the entrenched enemy positions below.

The 269<sup>th</sup> changed its tactics after realizing that the enemy was always geared for early morning CA's. If not assaulted early, the enemy would assume that an attack was not likely to happen that day. With the concurrence of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 269<sup>th</sup> began conducting CA's during the mid-morning, noon and afternoon hours in order to keep the enemy off balance, a condition that could be exploited to the ground commander's advantage. Ground commander's also used Smokey for covering the flanks of advancing troops as they moved



past or near a suspected enemy position, laying a deceptive smoke screen on a diversionary LZ and dispensing CS gas.

The 269<sup>th</sup> developed a technique that proved highly effective in night CA's. Smokey would proceed the flight by two or three minutes and dispense smoke parallel to the correct landing azimuth, 75-100 meters to one side or the other of the LZ. The smoke provided a screen from the enemy positions and also provided the flight leader with a visible path to follow in the dark to follow into the LZ, since the smoke could be seen for miles. It allowed the flight leader the advantage of aligning the flight with the LZ, setting up a proper landing azimuth prior to departing the RP and prevented any hazardous last minute changes in the flight path on short final.

This procedure was even more effective when used with organic flare ship illumination. Usually an Air Force "Spooky" was requested for these night missions. On occasion when darkness fell and "Spooky" hadn't arrived on station the 269<sup>th</sup> would scramble one of the battalion's organic flare ships, which was on strip alert standby, equipped with thirty M-24 flares on board. The flare ship would stay on station until "Spooky" showed or they ran out of flares and another flare ship from the 188<sup>th</sup>, 116<sup>th</sup> or 187<sup>th</sup> was scrambled. Since it was not feasible to set aside one aircraft and crew on a permanent basis, all flight crews were trained in the proper procedure and handling of the M-24 flare.

In 1967 and 1968 there was no shortage of volunteers to fly on Smokey Baron, but one name that stands out above all is CWO Russ Sanderson. In the battalion journals, Smokey was the term used by commander's to request the smoke ship through channels, but most of the time they requested Sanderson by name. In December of 1967, the 188<sup>th</sup> was the first company in the 269<sup>th</sup> to be assigned its own organic smoke ship, Black Widow Smokie. In the spring of 1968 the 269<sup>th</sup> converted two UH-1C gunships into smoke ships and assigned them to the 116<sup>th</sup> and 187<sup>th</sup>.

Flying on Smokey was definitely the most hazardous and dangerous job in the 269<sup>th</sup>. In my opinion, you had to be dedicated, crazy or an adrenalin junkie to volunteer for Smokey Baron. These guys needed a wheel barrel, to haul their brass balls in, as they headed for the flight line.

Reference: 269<sup>th</sup> CAB, Operational Report Lessons Learned, May 1967-April 1968

Input from LTG James Merryman



Charles Bagnaschi Collection

**SMOKEY BARON II  
AT THE WEB DAU TIENG**



Curt Knapp Collection

**SMOKEY BARON I  
AT CU CHI**

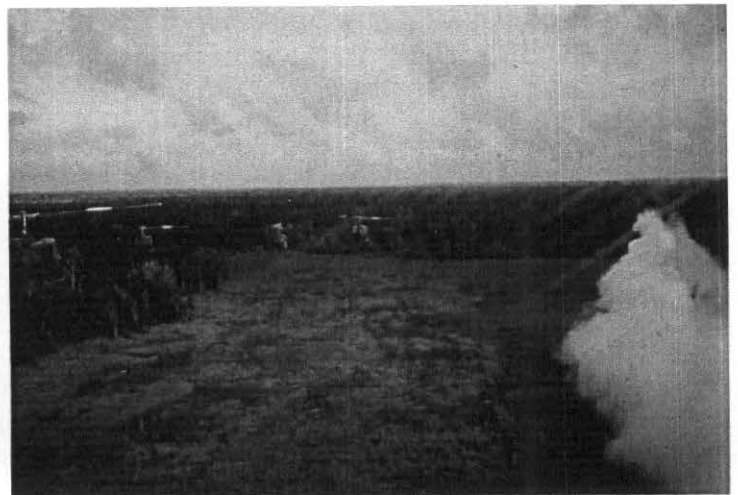
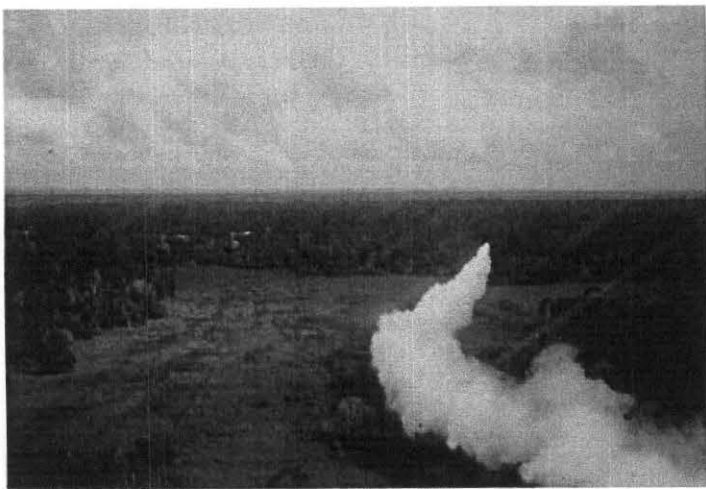


Dick Sperling Collection

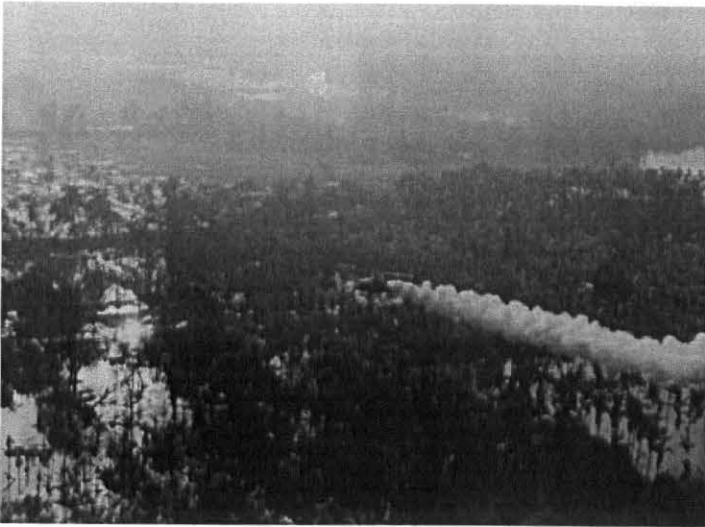
**SMOKEY BARON II  
REFUELING AT THE WEB  
DAU TIENG**



Jimmy Ogle Collection

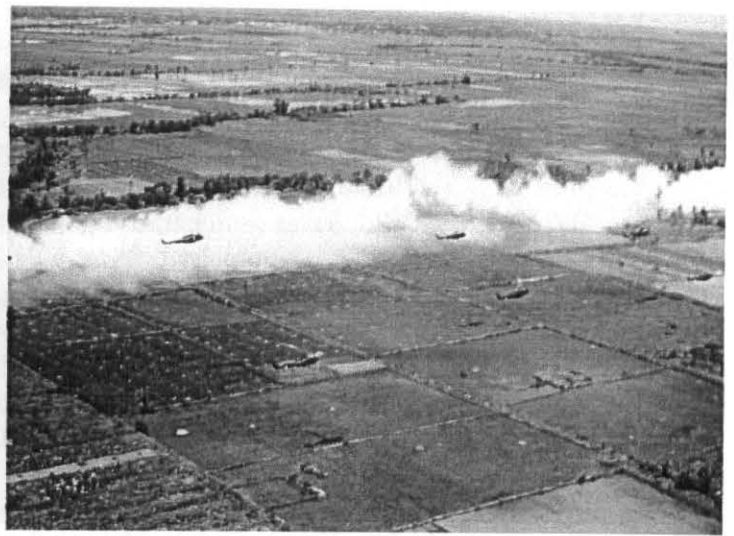


**THESE 5 PHOTOS ARE A SEQUENCE OF A 188th COMBAT ASSAULT  
USING SMOKEY BARON I DURING OPERATION DIAMOND HEAD,  
INSERTING THE 3/22nd INFANTRY, REGULARS AND THE 2/12th  
INFANTRY, WHITE WARRIORS.**



Dick Detra Collection

**SMOKEY BARON II  
DOIN' A RUN DURING  
OPERATION KOLE KOLE**



Dick Detra Collection

**BLACK WIDOWS ON SHORT  
FINAL DURING OPERATION  
BARKING SANDS**



Dave De Mauro Collection

**187th AHC CRUSADERS' SMOKEY MADE THE COVER OF NEWSWEEK  
MAGAZINE IN 1969**

## MY CHANCE TO FLY SMOKEY

By Curt Knapp

I had wanted to be a pilot ever since I was eight years old...when I took my first airplane ride. Although I learned to fly in the Hiller OH-23, I was really looking forward to flying the legendary UH-1H huey in combat. After about fifty hours of huey training at Fort Rucker, Alabama...I was primed and the Army said, "I was ready". Graduating from flight school in 1967 as a "WOBBLY ONE," I was assigned to the Aviation Section of the 2<sup>ND</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>ST</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky...flying OH-23's...oh, well.

After three months of stateside B...S... the entire brigade was flown to NAM in Air Force C-141s. While visiting the cockpit of the C-141 I was on, the pilot suggested that since I was going to Cu Chi, I should look up his brother-in-law, a Major McKnight at the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, the Black Barons. So after making the rookie mistake of removing my hat a split second after coming through the door of the Black Baron Club, the drinks were on me as the Major explained the mission of the 269<sup>th</sup>.

The battalion presided over the 188<sup>th</sup>, 116<sup>th</sup> and 187<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Companies. Headquarters had a Charlie model huey that Major McKnight had converted into a smoke ship." Smokey the Baron's " role was to fly low and slow around the perimeter of the LZ in advance of the troop carrying slicks. As oil was pumped from a tank under the the seats in the cargo bay to a ring around the hot engine exhaust, a thick white cloud of smoke would obscure the enemy's view of the vulnerable in bound flight of slicks. It was a dangerous job, but this would be my kind of flying...low and slow amid the terrain and flying bullets...helping to keep the country free from those Communist aggressors. And this was my lucky day because...they needed another pilot!

I'm sure we all remember that first time the collective was lowered...the cyclic was pushed forward and we plunged in fear towards our rendezvous with destiny. Here's how mine went. Because the 101<sup>ST</sup> hadn't received their allotment of OH-23s yet, the brigade commander allowed me to train with the 269<sup>th</sup>. It was December 22, 1967, just one hangover after I had discovered the Black Baron Club. CW2 Russ "Sandy" Sanderson, a veteran of ten months in country, was the Aircraft Commander (AC) in the left seat. Since I would be the Peter Pilot, I sat in the right seat and got to mash the button that started the oil flowing towards the exhaust pipe.

Our first mission was an insertion to an LZ somewhere northwest of Cu Chi. We met up with the inbound flight of slicks and accompanied them to the general area of the operation while the LZ was being prepped by artillery. The dust and smoke kicked up by the rain of high-explosive (HE) shells made our destination easy to spot from the air. Then, as a white phosphorous shell exploded...signaling the end of the artillery barrage, we lowered our flight helmet visors...peeled off, and followed the Spider gunships down to the LZ. They screamed around the periphery blasting away with their pod-mounted mini-guns and rockets. The crew chief and door gunner's opening up with their free wheeling hand held M-60 machine guns...secured only by a bunji cord. Red tracers streamed out from the muzzles and tore into every hapless thing in their path. Some of the tracers would ricochet back into the air for another chance to come down and inflict random damage. The Spiders reported the LZ was "COLD", and I thought to myself..."SO FAR". We nosed over for our solitary run around the perimeter...timing it between the Spider gun runs and the arrival of the slicks. We also had to consider the wind so that the smoke wouldn't drift into the LZ and make it IFR. Oh boy...here we go! On the way in you start thinking about how thin that Plexiglas windshield really is...how pissed off Charlie must be by now and how the only weapon you've got is that stupid button in your hand.

Sandy had us at 60 knots...three feet off the ground... with the open rice paddy to our left and the suspected enemy filled tree line just outside my window to our right. He gave me the command...I squeezed the button and said "SMOKE ON". The crew chief stuck his head out into the slipstream, looked back toward the tail and said..."YOU'RE SMOKIN' ". Now folks, this is exciting enough, but then all of a sudden behind me and to my right a machine gun opens



up...BAP-BAP-BAP-BAP-BAP!!! Holy smokers, BATMAN, I didn't know that it was possible to jump two feet while restrained by a seat belt and shoulder harness and simultaneously try to slink down two feet into the safety and confines of the armor plate of my seat! BAP-BAP-BAP-BAP...jeez...that guy must be right outside my door. He was. It was my own door gunner laying down suppressive fire with his free wheeling, hand held M-60.

Well, I went on to log four and a half hours of combat assault time that day, getting to do some of the flying and some of the smoking. Kept the country free and my butt alive for another day anyway. And wouldn't you know it...After only five more days on SMOKEY the BARON, around the end of January 1968, the 101<sup>ST</sup>, in its infinite wisdom, pulled me back and said, "Pack it up, Curt. We're moving to a little flaw on the map in northern I Corps. It's only a small abandoned airstrip with a ring of foxholes around one end now, but when we build it into our brigade base camp it'll be called...LZ SALLY!"



Curt Knapp Collection

**SMOKEY BARON CHILLIN AT  
CU CHI DECEMBER '67.  
NOTICE 269th BULLSEYE  
MARKINGS ON TAIL BOOM.**



Dick Detra Collection

**SMOKEY BARON I DENYING  
THE VIET CONG A CLEAR  
FIELD OF FIRE DURING  
OPERATION BARKING SANDS.**



Curt Knapp Collection

**THE SURGEON GENERAL  
HAS DETERMINED THAT  
TOO MUCH SMOKIN' IS  
DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH**





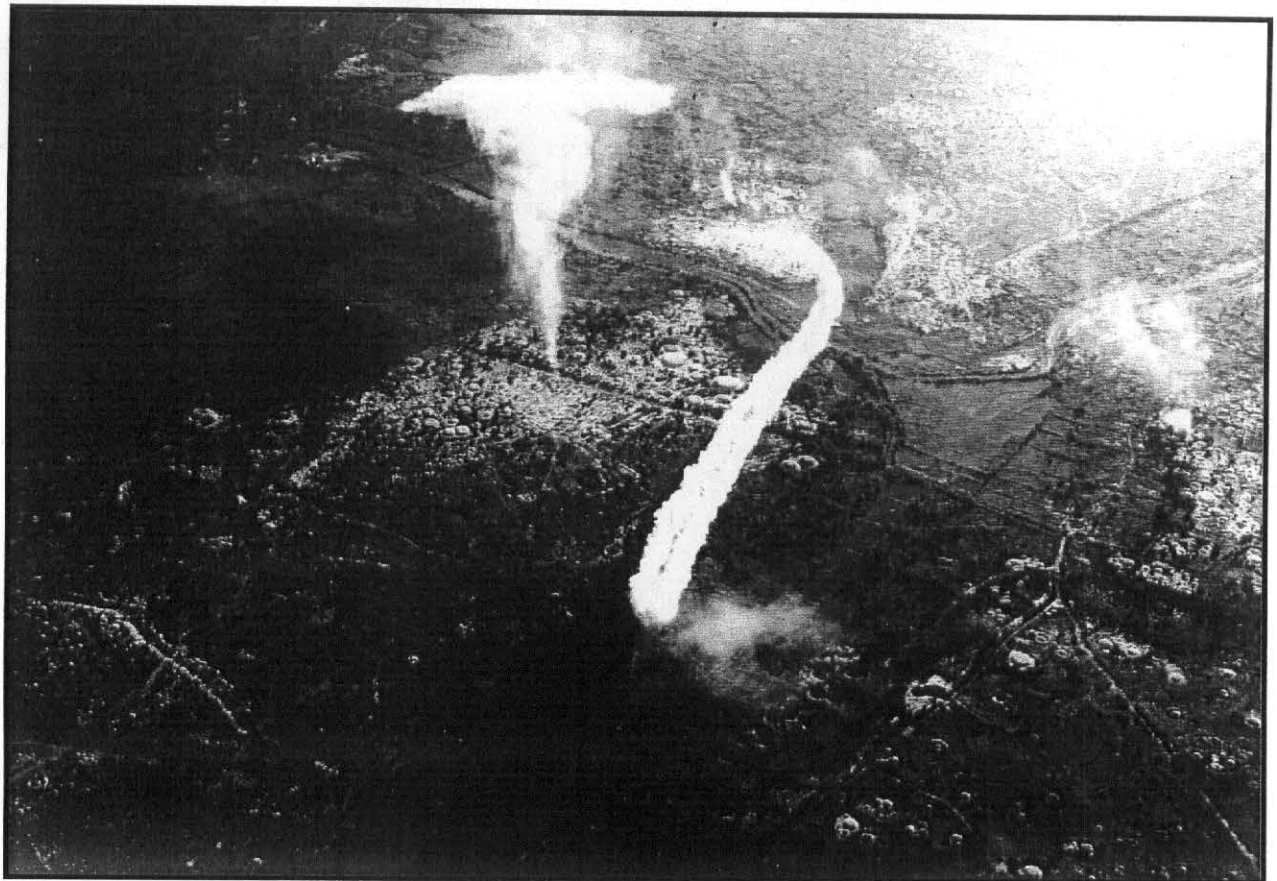
TED ALLEY COLLECTION

Crew Chief, Ted Alley posing alongside #16155. Notice smoke dispensing system in cargo bay... at LZ Sally



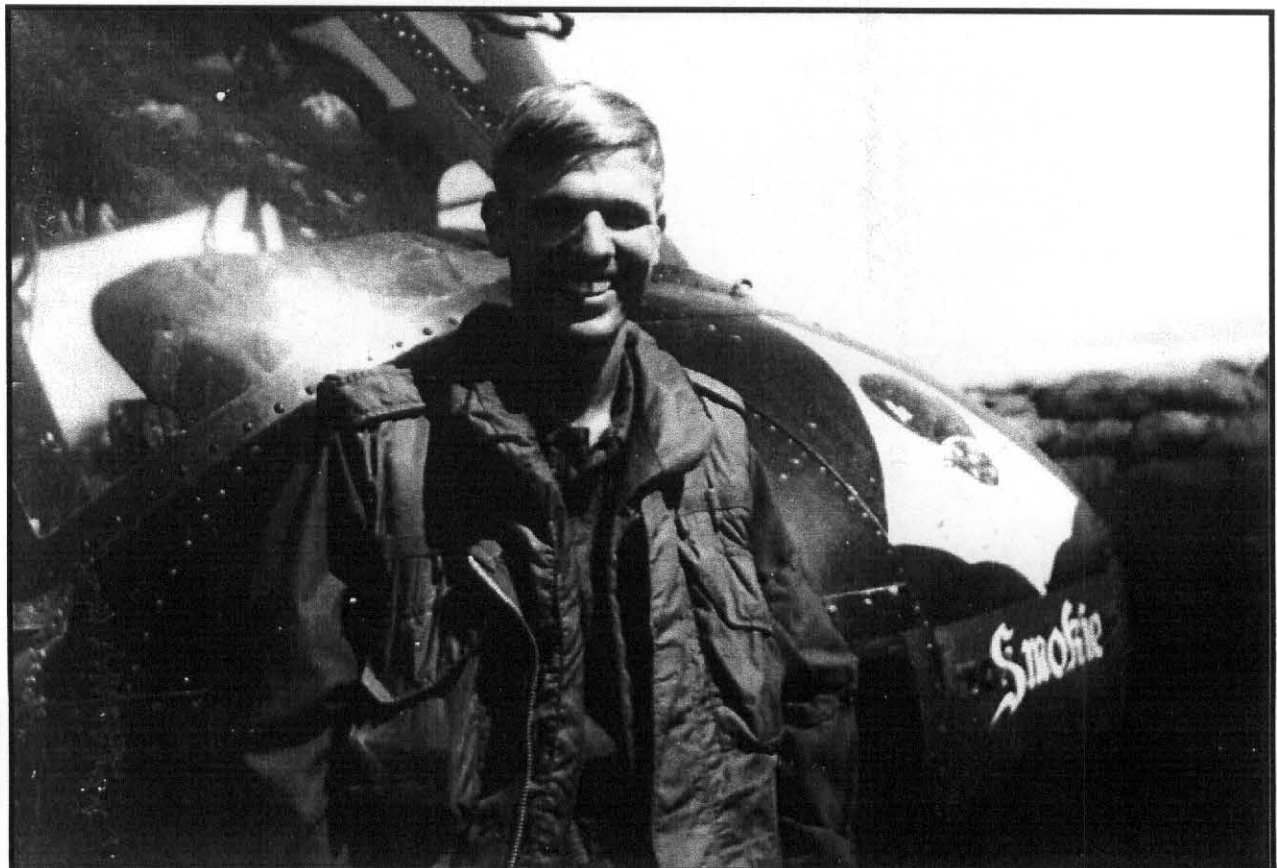
DICK DETRA COLLECTION

Black Widow Smokie I after Spider pilot Joe Walker hit a tree during a smoke run outside Dau Tieng during Tet on February 5, 1968.



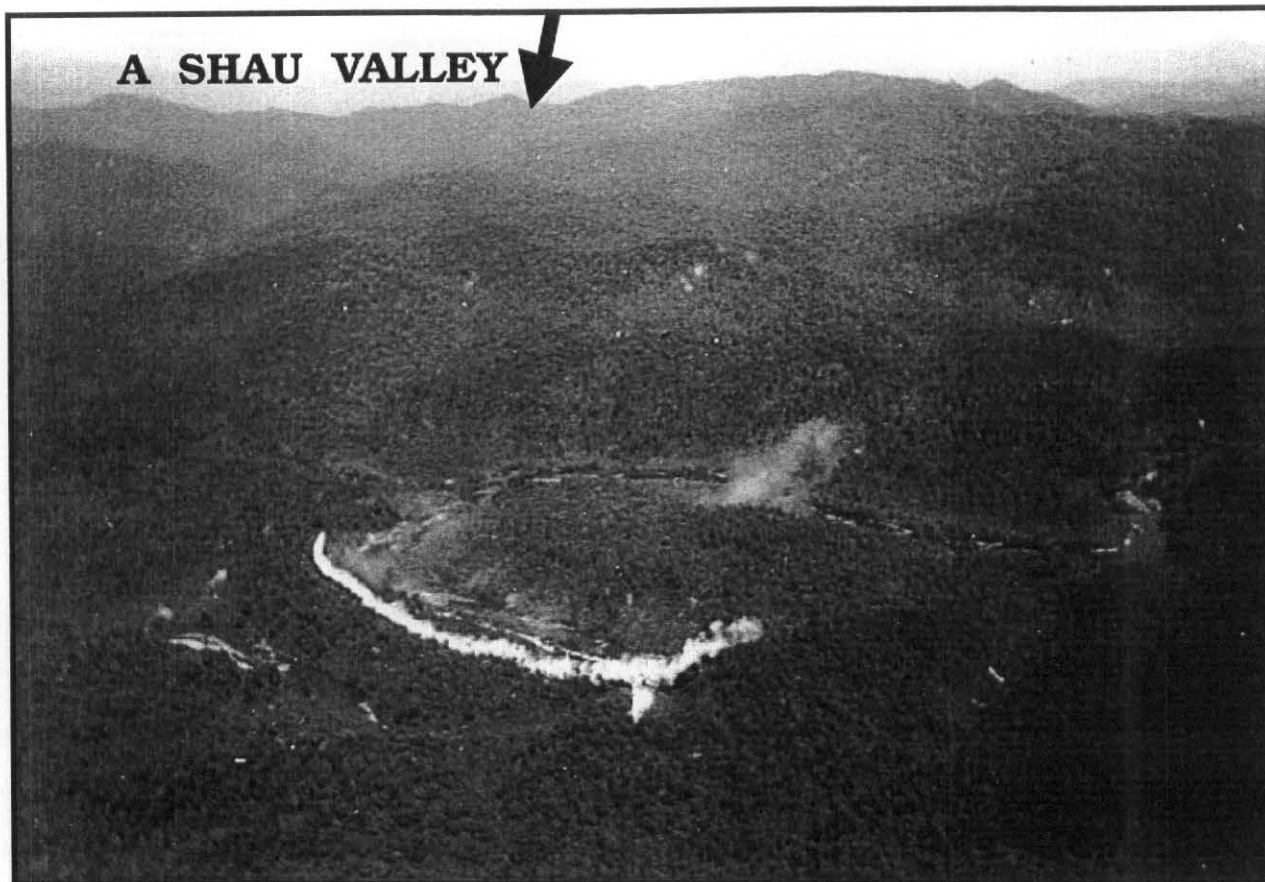
CURT KNAPP COLLECTION

"Smokie working east of LZ Sally"



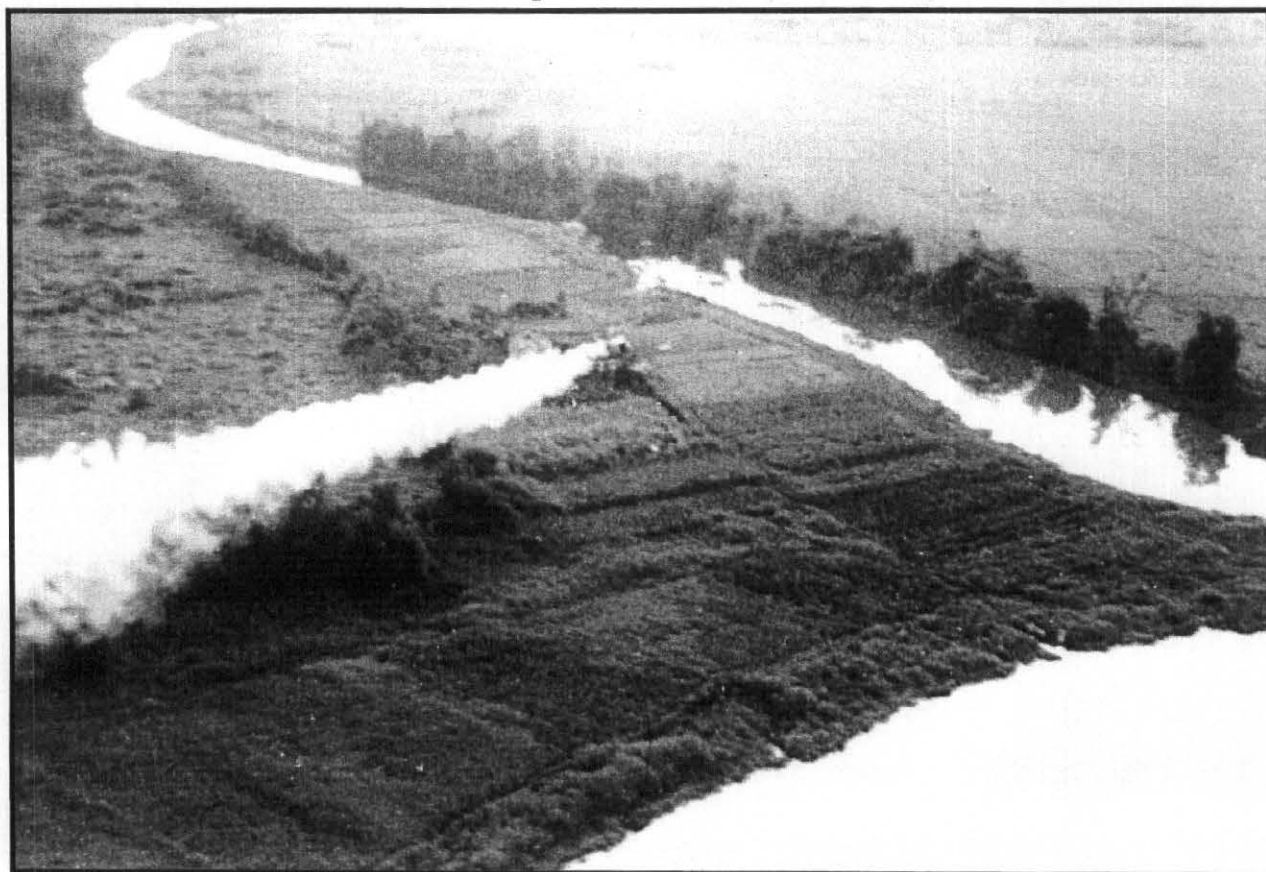
KJELL TOLLEFSEN COLLECTION

A/C KJELL "TROLL" TOLLEFSEN and #16155 Black Widow Smokie II at LZ Sally 1968



KJELL TOLLEFSEN COLLECTION

"Black Widow Smokie II smoke run southeast of A Shau Valley"  
 Arrow points to the A Shau



MIKE WILLIE COLLECTION

"Black Widow Smokie II workin' hard, Thua Thien Province"



## **Smokey and Smokie**

You will note that there is a different spelling of Smokey and Smokie in the text. The 269<sup>th</sup> CAB Smokey (picture on pages 62 and 65) had its name different from the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC Smokie. The 188<sup>th</sup> AHC Smokie (picture on page 70) documents the different spellings used for the smoke ships flown by each of the units.

## **Black Widow Smokie I**

The 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion had "Smokey the Baron," which was very effective when we did big (battalion size and larger) insertions in War Zone C, the Parrot's Beak, the Fish Hook, and just about any place in the western III Corps AO.

Just before the Tet offensive, the 188<sup>th</sup>, for some reason, came up with a C model Huey smoke ship. The system was installed at Battalion and we were in the smoke business. The word in the hootches, under the rubber trees was, "Who the hell was going to fly it?" A slick pilot or a gun pilot??? On the first few practice missions, the Spider gun teams would fly cover and make sure the smoke dispersant system worked. CWO Joe Walker, one of the Spiders, didn't like flying Black Widow Smokie that much because the damn thing only had the door gunner and crew chief on board with any firepower. There was this big frecken tank of oil secured against the bulkhead in the cargo bay that contained the oil that was injected into the hot end section of the engine through nozzles and then shot the oil into the hot exhaust making this huge plume of smoke. The plan was . . . one pilot would fly as fast as he could and the other pilot would press the button when we got below the tree-tops and paralleled the tree-line. The purpose was to make a smoke screen so the enemy could not see the advancing helicopters as well as providing the grunts with a little more time to get set up in the LZ after being inserted. Sometimes we would have to make another crazy high speed pass just before the departing Hueys lifted out of the LZ. This smoke screen would cover the flight until they (sometimes) got out of the area.

One bright morning after being on counter mortar all night and having been scrambled a couple of times, Joe was walking back to his hootch to get some shut eye. The new Spider platoon leader, Captain McMillan, met up with Joe and wanted him to fly the morning mission. The 188<sup>th</sup> "Black Widow Smokie" smoke ship was going to be used and the Captain wanted Joe to give him a check ride in the aircraft at the same time. Joe really didn't want to do it, but there was no one else to fly it. The rest of the Spider pilots were flying their gunships on this particular mission. SP/4 Dennis Pierpoint was the door gunner and the crew chief's name is unknown. So, we took off and flew the mission. When the LZ was finally identified, we dropped down on the deck for our first smoke run. Well, as any smart human being knows, if there are any VC in the area, a low flying smoke ship is a good target to boresight your weapons on. From where I was sitting and flying, it looked like the wrong end of a firing range at Fort Ord, California. The tracers were actually crisscrossing in front of us as the VC tried to lead the aircraft. Pierpoint was firing like crazy, but there were too many targets to engage. Captain McMillan had his thumb on the button and was looking over his shoulder at the fire fight as tracers started flying through the open cargo bay as well as through the side of the cockpit.

Well, I was jinking and juking through the trees and was just about to start my pull up when I felt something strong hit and saw the caution panel light up. Then I saw this huge tree straight ahead and felt the stiff controls indicating a hydraulic failure as well as a lot of smoke in the cockpit. I actually thought I was still bullet proof and that I could clear the on coming tree which towered above the rest of the trees. Suddenly, I felt the smoke ship lose power and we hit the tree top. Everything, including time, seemed to stop for a brief second and then we started flying forward again, although not as fast. The sound of incoming fire was really loud now. When I looked over at Captain McMillan, his eyes were closed and he was bleeding from his mouth and nose. The entire cockpit panel on his side was crushed up against him and I could see a huge limb from the dead tree sticking into the cockpit between his pedals. We did the usual "May-day" thing (thank God the radios still worked) even though the entire flight witnessed the whole fiasco. A Spider Light Fire Team fell in next to me and, sure enough (like all other Bell products), the smoke ship continued to fly.

With stuck pedals, hydraulic failure, and trailing smoke, we made one hell of a running landing at Cu Chi. The first "Black Widow Smokie" was totaled. Joe had to go and see LTC Merryman at Battalion that night with the CO Major Jack O. Johnson, to explain the loss of the Huey. During the discussion it came to light that Captain McMillan had put himself down as the AC and was on his way home with a Purple Heart. The entire crew who flew that day will never forget "Black Widow Smokie's" last flight. Captain McMillan never returned to the unit after being medi-evaced out after the landing.

## **Black Widow Smokie II**

One night, shortly after the 188<sup>th</sup> set up shop at LZ Sally, the second platoon sergeant asked crew chief SP/4 Ted Alley if he wanted to volunteer to fly the new Black Widow Smokie. Both Ted and his door gunner, SP/4 Ron (Cooch) Piecuch, jumped at the chance to fly the smoke ship. A second platoon slick, tail #16155, had been fitted with an oil dispensing smoke system and was good to go for combat missions. The Aircraft Commander, CWO Kjell "Troll" Tollefsen (Black Widow 45), could fly Smokie through the eye of a needle. The nickname "Troll" came about because of the troll doll he always had sitting on the console. He took that doll on every flight he ever went on. The rush of flying wide open, on the deck, at tree-top level was something this crew would never forget. The crew always received ground fire during their smoke runs. They flew so low and were going so fast that the enemy had a hard time hitting the helicopter. When they drew fire, Ted was supposed to throw red smoke to mark the enemy position, but because they were moving so fast, his smoke would hit the ground a couple of hundred yards away from where the enemy fire was received. During one of our smoke runs, the CO screamed over the radio to drop smoke when we received fire. It was a really "Hot LZ" and the sphincter factor was getting real tight. Ted finally put down his M-60 and started throwing smoke. He popped smoke along the entire circle of the smoke run because that was where they were receiving fire: the CO didn't like that either.

Three days before DEROS, Ted was flying a smoke mission without "Troll." The mission was along a sandy beach of the South China Sea next to an enemy controlled hamlet. There were a few trees scattered around the area. The AC made the first run around the LZ. A few minutes later another flight came in and they made another smoke run. The Peter Pilot asked to make the second run. Things were going fine and Ted was doing suppression fire into a clump of bushes and wasn't watching to the front. The pilot came to a tree-line, pulled up, and clipped the top of a tree on Ted's side. His head, foot, and M-60 were sticking out past the door and when that tree-top hit, it nearly killed Ted. He had just recently started wearing a monkey strap, and it saved his life. There were green stains on his left boot and pants leg. Pieces of leaves hung on his M-60. The impact bent the airfoil on the left side of the aircraft flat against the pylon.

There was a regulation of some kind that when the 188<sup>th</sup> went on a combat assault that a medic was to be present. The smoke ship flew with a light load and had plenty of room, so the medic always flew with them. That was pretty neat because until then our 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment Medics didn't get to fly much. The smoke ship gave them the rush of a life time. Anyway, when the medic took Ted's boot off, he thought his leg was broken. Ted was OK, but the whole inside of his left foot was entirely blue by the time he got back to the world.

### The Marvels of the Mind and Soul

Memories as vivid as yesterday, and yet impossible to describe. Faces of great friends, but no longer able to remember their names. Extreme emotions of closeness and admiration for crews and pilots, but I haven't seen them in 32 years. There are a lot of problems with reliving or describing memories of the '67 - '68 Black Widows. I'm sure a shrink would tell us that we have repressed our memories as a defense, but I prefer to think of it as senility. There's hardly been a day that I don't reflect on those times, but it's evolved into fond memories and humorous stories. With that said and a large disclaimer for accuracy or literary skill, I will share some harmless tidbits.

### Smokie

My recollection was that the first smoke ship was built around a UH-1C at Dau Tieng. The ship I flew was a UH-1H slick ship (AC#66-16155) at LZ Sally. The ship was fitted with a rectangular bladder under the rear seat. Low viscosity oil was pumped to a ring that surrounded the turbine exhaust and sprayed a mist of oil into the exhaust to produce a large plume of smoke. The missions were designed to lay down a visual screen at the edge of the LZ just prior to an insertion or extraction of ground troops. Smokie would make a high speed, very low level run and, typically, be supported by two gunships on our wing to provide suppression. What more could a young, crazy pilot ask for . . . high speed on the deck flying and blazing gunships at your side!

The wisdom of the military in '68 was to fight seasonally to recapture control of the Ashau Valley. These missions were never at a loss for action. We knew one evening that we were to make smoke runs the next morning in a hot spot of the valley. Being the true professionals that we were, we formulated a preparatory plan simple in its elements and easily executed. We began drinking immediately and continued until there was no chance that we would feel anything. The story continues with less clarity. We had decided to leave nothing to chance, so upon arrival at the aircraft, we chanted, "Give me a G! Give me an O! Give me a D! Yeah God!!" and prepared for take off. Unfortunately, the crew seemed less than thrilled about flying with a couple of drunken heathens. Fortunately, they felt that someone needed to try to keep us alive, so they jumped in (Note: Once again, the crew saved our ass). With the helpful hints and reminders from the crew, we apparently arrived on time, and delivered a few smoke runs. I began remembering more on the way back to LZ Sally. There was a low level cloud cover and scud which made navigating to and from the valley treacherous. Shortly after returning, a senior officer came running over and, much to our amazement, kept rambling on about how spectacular our runs under and around the burnt out trees were. The moral of the story is that without a good crew, you didn't survive for long. THANKS GUYS!!!!

I would also like to thank:

Troll doll for a little luck. He flew every mission on the dash.

Doc Hannah for the hangover medication.

The abundance of friendships.

The ultimate beverage "Thunderclap" which was a shot of everything behind the bar topped off with beer.

Kjell "TROLL" Tollefsen  
Black Widow 45 '67 '68

### Happy New Year- NVA Style

This action started with a Tactical Emergency call to the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC from the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB in the middle of the night on 1 January 1968. The 188<sup>th</sup> had been part of Operation Yellowstone, the largest heliborne operation of the war, which combat assaulted the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division into an area near the Cambodian border north west of Dau Tieng in the heart of War Zone C. Following the initial assault the 188<sup>th</sup> had continued to support the 25<sup>th</sup> Division with ammunition support on an almost daily basis.

When BW6 received the call for a Tactical Emergency it meant that we would turn out every flyable aircraft and crew that we could muster and go to the relief of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. A TACE at 1:30 in the morning meant that the Division was in deep trouble and they needed us badly. The Spiders were first up and gone by the time we assembled all of the flyable lift ships and got lined up on our assembly area. The gunships operated independently during the rest of the operation under direct control of the Division. BW6 was flying the lead ship on this one; no C&C was needed. As we approached Katum, the Divisions main base, there was one big fire going on in the area of the airfield ( really a big LZ and refueling area) which was the result of two aircraft running into each other on the ground. They were burning so intensely and there was so much confusion that the Division LZ was unusable.

When BW6 contacted the Division operations on the radio they directed us to switch to a logistics frequency and work directly with



them using the log pad to begin resupply of FSB Burt. We had been supporting the operation in the past so we were able to switch to the right frequency and go to the open log pad without problems. We landed and were told that our mission would be to resupply FSB Burt and bring out the wounded, if we could, and there was some real concern that we would be able to get into FSB Burt at all. The log pad and the LZ we were going to use at FSB Burt was so small that we had to break down into flights of two aircraft working together and each pair of aircraft were on their own. There would be no direct gunship support since they were all engaged providing perimeter gun-runs around all of the Divisions positions which were under attack. It would have been very easy for any of the aircraft pairs to bug out or find some other reason to not go into Burt, but everyone hung in there and off we went into one of the greatest fire works displays ever seen.

When the first flight of two departed the log pad with ammo for Burt there was no problem finding the location of the Fire Support Base because the base was a solid ring of red and green tracers going in and out and up at anything in the air. It wasn't hard to find the place in the middle of a dark night.

BW6 got some guy on the radio and received instructions to land on his flash light which was pretty hard to pick out from all of the tracers, so he came up with a survival strobe light from some where and we were able to get a visual contact with the landing zone. We made a steep approach with blacked out running lights and no landing lights either. The approach was into the southern end of the base and when we touched down it looked like we were landing in a bunch of logs laying around on the ground. The guy with the strobe light was laying flat on his back right in front of the nose of the lead aircraft talking to us on the radio; can't blame him for not being on his feet.

We off loaded the ammo as fast as we could and on loaded as many wounded as we could and then we got out of Dodge as quick as we could. The wounded went to the evac hospital in Tay Ninh and then we went back to the log pad for another run into Burt. The whole company went through the same routine through out the rest of the night, in and out, with no direct gun support or any other cover for that matter and not one ship held back from that Hell on Earth.

When it finally started to get light and the action started to slow down a bit we were able to see that the logs we were landing between in the LZ were NVA bodies. They had penetrated the south end of the base and could have over run several of the gun positions but because of direct artillery fire and some hand to hand combat they failed. They had come really close to getting in the rear of several unit positions and had failed only because of the determined defense put up by 3/22 Infantry and the 2/77 Artillery.

The Battle of Suoi Cut or FSB Burt is covered in two books written by infantry company commanders who were there . The books are Absolution: Charley Company by Charles Boyle and Platoon: Bravo Company by Robert Hemphill. In addition, the 188<sup>th</sup> received two letters of commendation from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Commander, Col Leonard R. Daems, Jr., and the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion Commander, LTC James H. Merryman. Copies of the letters are attached to this story.

It is hard to remember who all was submitted recommendations for awards for that night, but everyone did one hell of a job in responding to the Divisions situation. There were no fox holes in those Hueys and plexiglass and aluminum doesn't make for much of a shield, but not one Black Widow laid back for one second when we were the life line for FSB Burt on 1 and 2 January 1968.

Submitted by: Jack O. Johnson (LTC-R) Black Widow 6 1967-1968

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS 3D BRIGADE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
APO San Francisco 96268

AVDCTB-CO

10 March 1968

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation

TO: Commanding Officer  
188th Helicopter Assault Company  
APO 96268

1. I would like to take this opportunity to commend you and your unit for the fine support you afforded the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division on the night of 1-2 January 1968. The decisive victory this command experienced at the now famous Battle of Soui Cut would hardly have been possible had it not been for the outstanding performance of the "Black Widows".

2. Hampered by hazards of dust and darkness, in addition to direct enemy fire, your aviators displayed astute professionalism while resupplying our ground troops with badly needed ammunition. The spontaneous resupply sorties you furnished us with during that night are testimony to the "Black Widows" well known teamwork and combat record. In addition, the arrival of your unit at Katum, at the height of the battle, was a significant morale factor both to the combat and combat support troops of this command.

3. Again, I commend you for your untiring efforts. The 188th Helicopter Assault Company has assisted this brigade on numerous occasions. I cannot express too strongly the respect and admiration both myself and the officers and men of the 3d Brigade have for the "Black Widows". I look forward to our joint efforts on future operations.



LEONARD R. DAEMS JR.  
Colonel, Infantry  
Commanding

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS, 269TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION  
APO 96353  
"DISCIPLINED PROFESSIONALS"

AVGC-F

3 January 1968

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation

TO: Commanding Officer  
188th Assault Helicopter Company  
APO 96268

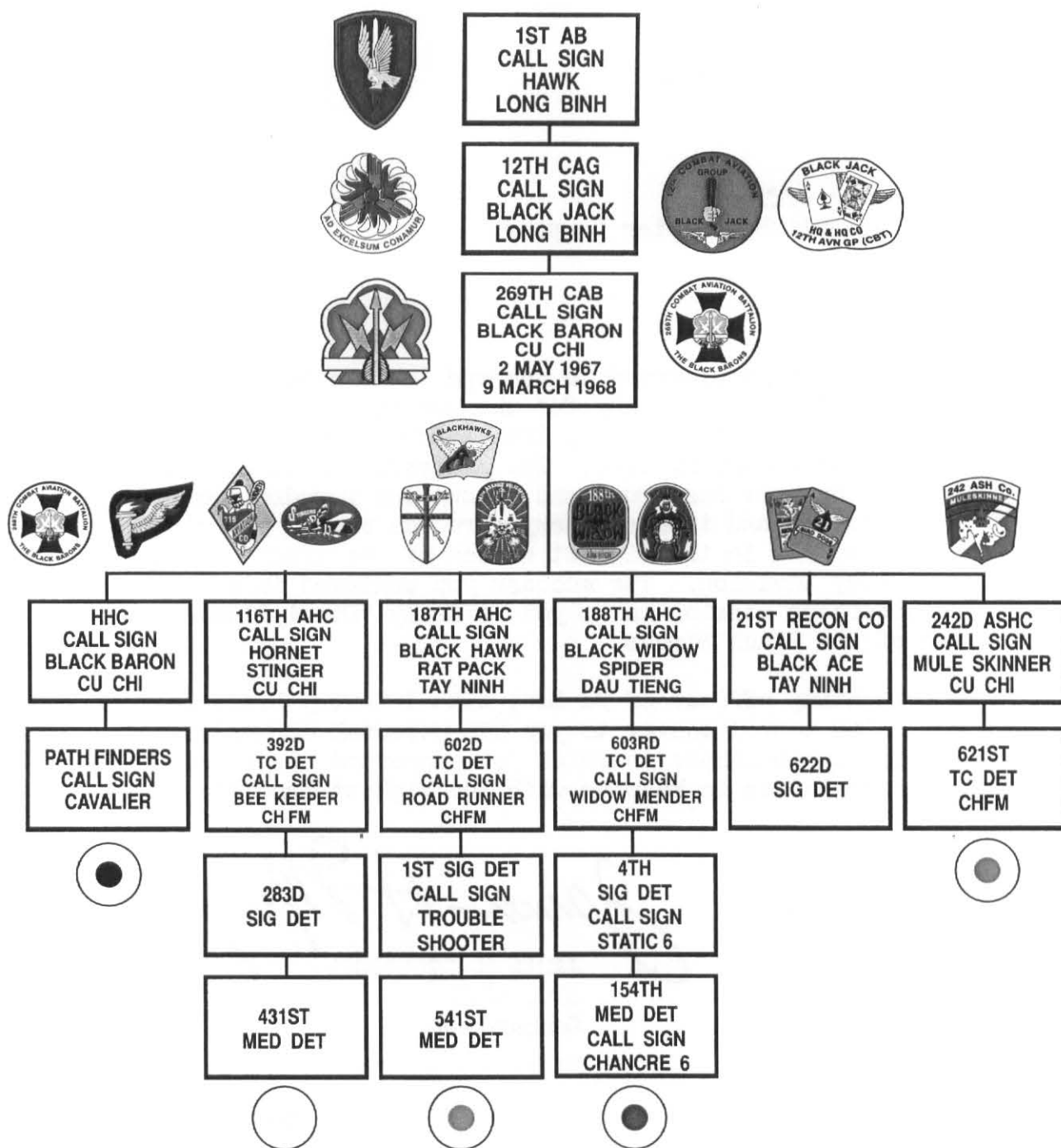
1. It gives me great pleasure to commend the officers and men of the 188th Assault Helicopter Company for the courage and dedication to duty demonstrated in support of the 3d Bde, 25th Infantry Division, during the pre-dawn hours of 2 January 1968. The professionalism demonstrated in supporting Fire Support Base Burt and evacuating wounded from the area in the face of constant and intense enemy fire has earned you sincere gratitude and placed you in the highest esteem of the ground commanders of the 25th Infantry Division. The success you achieved in executing this difficult and hazardous mission marks you as truly "Disciplined Professionals" of the Black Barons.

2. The commanding officer of 3d Bde, 25th Infantry Division, COL DAMES, has requested that I convey to you his personal commendation and gratitude for the superb manner in which you supported his forces. Your outstanding achievement is in keeping with the highest traditions of Army Aviation.



JAMES H. MERRYMAN  
LTC, ARTY  
Commanding

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHAIN OF COMMAND



● The 269th CAB aircraft markings consisted of a white circle and each company was assigned a distinctive color bullseye for visual identification.

## LISTEN UP

1ST AB - 1st AVIATION BRIGADE, LARGEST ARMY COMBAT COMMAND IN VIETNAM.

AHC - ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

ASHC - ASSAULT SUPPORT HELICOPTER COMPANY

CAB - COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION, III CORPS

CAG - COMBAT AVIATION GROUP

CHFM - CARGO HELICOPTER FIELD MAINTENANCE

HHC - HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

MED DET - MEDICAL DETACHMENT

SIG DET - SIGNAL DETACHMENT

TC DET - TRANSPORTATION COMPANY DETACHMENT

RECON CO - FIXED WING, BIRD DOG RECONNAISSANCE AND SURVEILLANCE COMPANY

SOURCE: 269th CAB Quarterly Reports, Operational Report Lessons Learned (ORLL) 1967 - 1968

## 12th Combat Aviation Group

Unit	Location	Unit	Location
<b>12th Combat Aviation Group</b>		<b>214th Combat Aviation Battalion</b>	
Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Long Binh	Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Bear Cat
338th Aviation Detachment	Long Binh	772nd Medical Detachment	Bear Cat
340th Aviation Detachment	(Attached to 1st Log Command)	17th Assault Helicopter Company	Long Binh
341st Aviation Detachment	(Attached to 25th Infantry Division)	613th Transportation Corp Detachment	Long Binh
87th Quarter Master Detachment (PETRL)	(Attached to 154th Artillery Group)	*722nd Signal Corp Detachment	Long Binh
390th Quarter Master Detachment (PETRL)	(Attached to 25th Infantry Division)	93rd Medical Detachment	Long Binh
391st Quarter Master Detachment (PETRL)	(Attached to 101st Airborne Division)	135th Assault Helicopter Company	Long Giao
*9th Signal Corp Detachment	(Attached to 11th ARM CAV REGT)	614th Transportation Company Detachment	Long Giao
		*68th Signal Corp Detachment	Long Giao
<b>11th Combat Aviation Battalion</b>		191st Assault Helicopter Company	Bear Cat
Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Phu Loi	606th Transportation Corp Detachment	Bear Cat
128th Assault Helicopter Company	Phu Loi	26th Signal Corp Detachment	Bear Cat
393rd Transportation Corp Detachment	Phu Loi	195th Assault Helicopter Company	Long Binh
*285th Signal Corp Detachment	Phu Loi	609th Transportation Corp Detachment	Long Binh
432nd Medical Detachment	Phu Loi	*366th Signal Corp Detachment	Long Binh
		200th Assault Support Helicopter Company	Bear Cat
162nd Assault Helicopter Company	Phuoc Vinh	611th Transportation Corp Detachment	Bear Cat
407th Transportation Corp Detachment	Phuoc Vinh	240th Assault Helicopter Company	Bear Cat
*450th Signal Corp Detachment	Phuoc Vinh	619th Transportation Corp Detachment	Bear Cat
758th Medical Detachment	Phuoc Vinh	*932nd Signal Corp Detachment	Bear Cat
		<b>222nd Combat Support Aviation Battalion</b>	
173rd Assault Helicopter Company	Lai Khe	Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Vung Tau
408th Transportation Corp Detachment	Lai Khe	85th Medical Detachment	Vung Tau
*451st Signal Corp Detachment	Lai Khe	147th Assault Support Helicopter Company	Vung Tau
759th Medical Detachment	Lai Khe	171st Transportation Corp Detachment	Vung Tau
		205th Assault Support Helicopter Company	Phu Loi
213th Assault Support Helicopter Company	Phu Loi	612th Transportation Corp Detachment	Phu Loi
329th Transportation Corp Detachment	Phu Loi	273rd Assault Support Helicopter Company	Vung Tau
		652nd Transportation Corp Detachment	Vung Tau
<b>145th Combat Aviation Battalion</b>		<b>269th Combat Aviation Battalion</b>	
Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Bien Hoa	Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Cu Chi
145th Sec Platoon	Bien Hoa	116th Assault Helicopter Company	Cu Chi
68th Assault Helicopter Company	Bien Hoa	392nd Transportation Corp Detachment	Cu Chi
391st Transportation Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	283rd Signal Corp	Cu Chi
*282nd Signal Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	431st Medical Detachment	Cu Chi
430th Medical Detachment	Bien Hoa	21st Recon Airplane Company	Tay Ninh
117th Assault Helicopter Company	Bien Hoa	622nd Signal Corp Detachment	Tay Ninh
140th Transportation Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	187th Assault Helicopter Company	Tay Ninh
*256th Signal Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	602nd Transportation Corp Detachment	Tay Ninh
118th Assault Helicopter Company	Bien Hoa	1st Signal Corp Detachment	Tay Ninh
573rd Transportation Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	541st Medical Detachment	Tay Ninh
*198th Signal Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	188th Assault Helicopter Company	Dau Tieng
190th Assault Helicopter Company	Bien Hoa	603rd Transportation Corp Detachment	Dau Tieng
605th Transportation Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	4th Signal Corp Detachment	Dau Tieng
520th Medical Detachment	Bien Hoa	154th Medical Detachment	Dau Tieng
334th Assault Helicopter Company	Bien Hoa	242nd Assault Support Helicopter Company	Cu Chi
571st Transportation Corp Detachment	Bien Hoa	621st Transportation Corp Detachment	Cu Chi
*320th Signal Corps Detachment	Phu Loi		
<b>210th Combat Aviation Battalion</b>		<b>308th Combat Aviation Battalion</b>	
Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Long Thanh	Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Bien Hoa
129th Medical Detachment	Long Thanh		
120th Assault Helicopter Detachment	Long Binh		
*622nd Signal Corp Detachment	Long Binh		
		<b>3rd Squad 17th Air Cavalry</b>	
125th A Transportation Corp Company	Bien Hoa	Headquarters and Headquarters Troop	Di An
16th Signal Company	Tan Son Nhut	A Troop	Di An
USARV Fleet Detachment	Long Thanh	B Troop	Di An
25th Aviation Company	Long Binh	C Troop	Di An
154th Utility Airplane Company	Vung Tau	D Troop	Di An
255th Transportation Corp Detachment	Vung Tau	39th Transportation Detachment	Di An
73rd Survey Airplane Company	Vung Tau		
74th Recon Airplane Company	Phu Loi		
563rd Transportation Corp Detachment	Phu Loi		
184th Recon Airplane Company	Phu Loi		
243rd Signal Corp Detachment	Phu Loi		

Source: ORLL's, 12th Combat Aviation Group, 31 January 1968. During this reporting period, the 21st Aviation Company was attached to the 16th Combat Aviation Group.

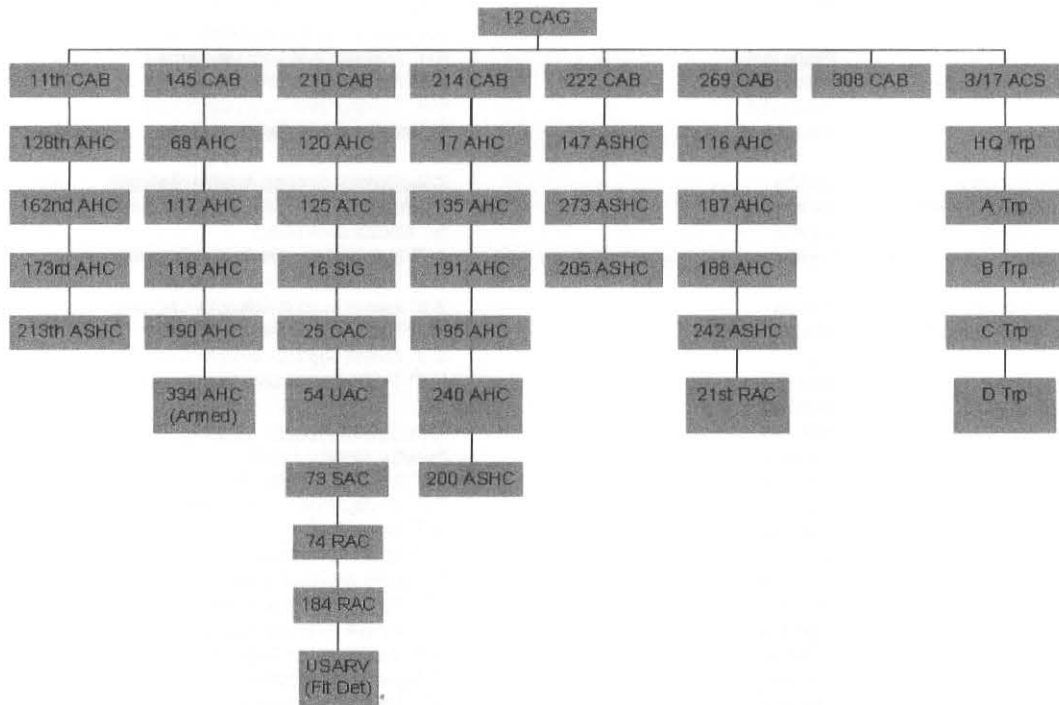


## 1st Aviation Brigade

During the Black Widows time in III Corps, the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade was commanded by Brigadier General George P. Seneff (May 1966 - October 1967) and succeeded by Major General Robert R. Williams (November 1967 - March 1968). Major Ford was the first army aviator and Major General Williams was the second (circa 1942), but was literally the father of Army Aviation. He was the man, the catalyst, that got things started from equipment to the missions flown. Major General Williams once told LTC Merryman, "That it seemed his days were always full of trouble . . . but never from the 269<sup>th</sup> Black Barons."

## 12th Combat Aviation Group

The 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group provided Army Aviation support to Commanding General, II Field Force/ Senior Advisor, III Army Republic of Vietnam Corps and at the direction of the Commanding General II Field Force Vietnam, provided aviation support to the United States, Republic of Vietnam, and Free World Forces in the III Corps Tactical Zone. The Group also provided aviation support as directed by COMUSMACV for support of the United States, Republic of Vietnam, and Free World Military Assistance Forces in the IV Corps Tactical Zone. It also commanded (less OPCON where specified) and administered assigned and attached Army aviation and support units.



### **Listen up:**

CAG: Combat Aviation Group  
CAB: Combat Aviation Battalion  
AHC: Assault Helicopter Company  
UAC: Utility Airplane Company  
SAC: Surveillance Airplane Company

RAC: Reconnaissance Airplane Company  
ASHC: Assault Support Helicopter Company  
FD: Flight Detachment  
CAC: Corps Aviation Company  
ACS: Air Cavalry Squadron

CSAB: Combat Support Aviation Battalion  
ATC: Air Traffic Control

Source: Operational Reports, Lessons Learned, 12th Combat Aviation Group, 31 January 1968.

## Organization

Organization of the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group on 31 January 1968 included the following units with headquarters located as indicated:

12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group - Long Binh  
11<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion - Phu Loi  
145<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion - Bien Hoa  
210<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion - Long Thanh  
214<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion - Bear Cat

222<sup>nd</sup> Combat Support Aviation Battalion - Vung Tau  
269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion - Cu Chi  
308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion - Bien Hoa  
3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 17<sup>th</sup> Air Cavalry - Di An

In addition, these units had elements stationed at Phuoc Vinh (162<sup>nd</sup> AHC), Lai Khe (173<sup>rd</sup> AHC), Dau Tieng (188<sup>th</sup> AHC), and Long Giao (135<sup>th</sup> AHC), as well as field positions as called for by the tactical situations.

Source: ORLL's, 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group, 31 January 1968

## **Black Jack 6**

Black Jack 6, Colonel Nicholas G. Psaki, commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group (CAG), directed the buildup and operations of the largest helicopter and fixed wing aviation group in the world at that time. Colonel Psaki guided the buildup from four established battalions and one provisional battalion when he assumed command of the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG from Colonel Raymond P. Campbell Jr. on April 10, 1967 to seven battalions and two air cavalry squadrons by April 10, 1968. The buildup increased the group's manpower by more than one third, from 6,300 men to nearly 10,000 men. Colonel Psaki utilized an infusion program to allow for a swifter transition from arrival of a unit to the time it is first committed to combat operations.

The infusion program was designed to transfer experienced aviators and personnel into newly organizing and arriving units and also to reassign some newly arrived personnel into experienced, established units. This enabled the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG to offset "the inexperience factor" and prevented a mass exodus of personnel from any single unit at the end of a year's tour of duty.

During this period the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG supported the 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and the 101<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions and the 5<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN Divisions in the III Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) and occasionally supported elements of the Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) in the other three CTZ's of Vietnam. During Psaki's tenure as commander, the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG supported the FWMAF on more than 100 operations and over 400 operations for our ARVN allies. The 12<sup>th</sup> CAG during this period flew over 1,187,600 sorties, airlifted more than 2,066,000 troops, 282,000 tons of cargo and flew nearly 500,000 hours.

Flying in support of ground elements during this period. 12<sup>th</sup> CAG helicopters killed nearly 3,000 enemy VC and NVA soldiers by body count and another estimated 1,600, destroyed over 4,500 sampans and 3,400 structures, and damaged another 150 sampans and 750 structures.

Since helicopters were always needed to move troops around, the expansion of the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG from what it had been a year before displayed not only the respect given to Aviation but indicated the vital part it would play during the Vietnam War.

Source: Black Jack Filers news letter March 1968

## **Tet '68**

Elements of the 274<sup>th</sup> and 275<sup>th</sup> Viet Cong Regiments launched a ground attack on the II Field Forces Compound in Long Binh on January 31, 1968, focusing the attack on the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group's headquarters company area. The attack was directed from an area called "Widows' Village" located on Highway 1A across the road from 12<sup>th</sup> Group Headquarters. The VC began the attack at 0305 hours by firing twenty rounds of 177 mm rocket and 60 mm mortar into the compound, know as the Plantation.

A forty minute lull that followed the initial rocket and mortar attack ended abruptly when the VC began firing small arms and RPG rockets at bunkers manned by personnel from 12<sup>th</sup> CAG Headquarters Company. SP/4 Gary Shope, reported the initial small arms fire and opened up with his M60 machine-gun when his bunker began receiving fire. There were three main bunkers in front of headquarters and the word was to return fire if fired upon. After the initial return fire went out, all hell broke loose and the entire bunker line opened up. Forty minutes after the ground attack began there was a call for ammunition. SGT. Ernie Ward drove a jeep loaded with ammo into the hot area which was receiving heavy incoming fire. 1<sup>st</sup> SGT. Richard F. Hond took over and began distributing the ammo all along the defensive perimeter.

The firefight continued into the daylight hours when gunships from the 145<sup>th</sup> and 214<sup>th</sup> CAB were called in to attack the VC positions with rocket and minigun fire. After a long four hours of exchanging fire a cease-fire was called along the 12<sup>th</sup> Groups perimeter as the gunships began their gun runs and elements of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry began a ground sweep.

Enemy sniper fire continued to be directed at the bunkers but died out as the gunships pounded the VC positions. Elements of the 9<sup>th</sup> ID, inserted into the western edge of the village by the slicks from the 214<sup>th</sup> CAB, swept through the village flushing out pockets of VC. The grunts found several structures concealing small arms, rockets, mortars and supplies plus a number of VC who had been pinned down by the gunships and the attacking troops. The complexity of the enemy's underground structures and the way they were dug in indicated that they had been there for four of five months waiting for the Tet offensive to begin. The action resulted in 34 VC dead, five wounded and three POW's taken directly across from the 12<sup>th</sup> group perimeter. Another 52 VC were found dead in the immediate area of the battle.



31 May 1999

The 188th Assault Helicopter Company, (the Black Widows), arrived in Vietnam in April 1967 and joined the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion (Black Barons) which I commanded. Located in Dau Tieng, they immediately found themselves in the middle of a hot combat zone and spent their days shooting at the VC and NVA and their nights dodging incoming rockets & mortars.

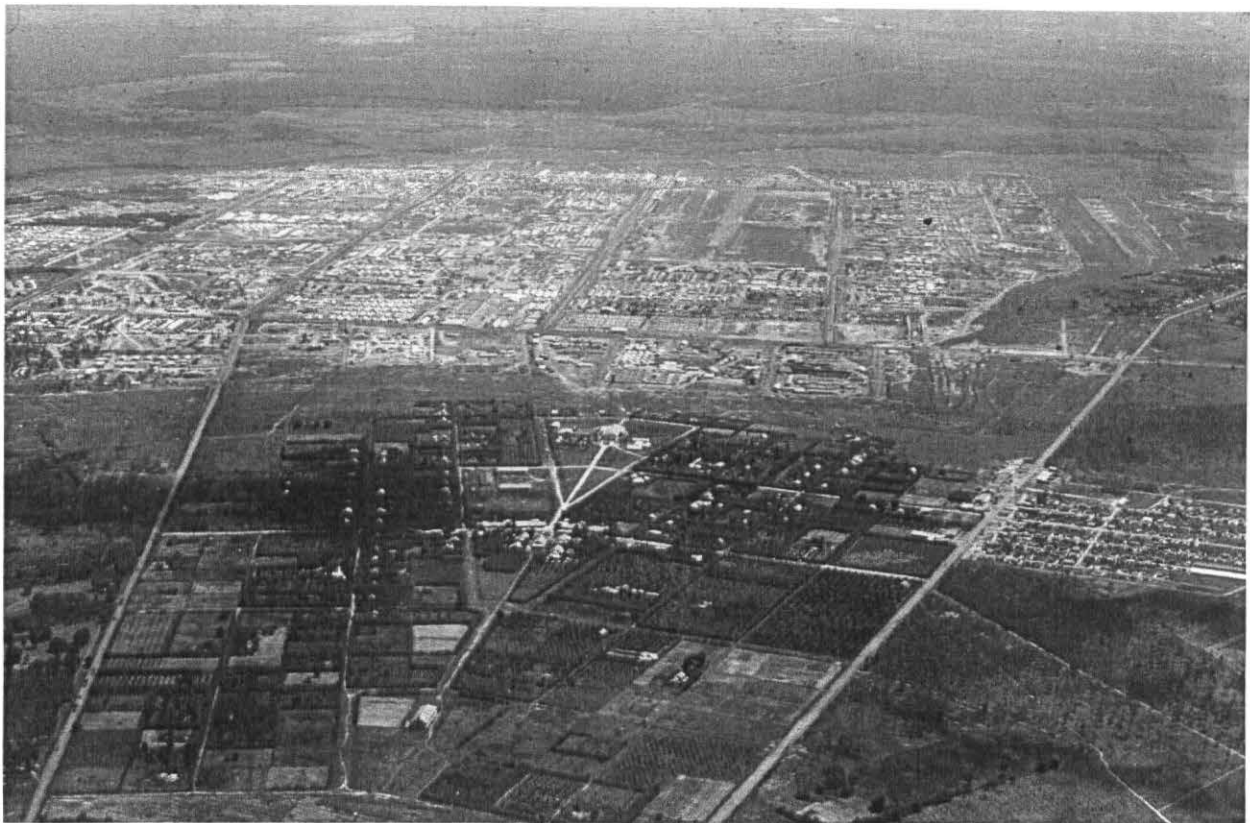
Probably no other Aviation Company in the 1st Aviation Brigade was called upon more often during 1967-68 to perform combat assaults or put out fires throughout War Zone C and points south.

The Black Widows never complained and were always in the thick of battle. Many times they contributed to its successful outcome. They took more than their share in personnel and aircraft lost to the enemy.

Any man who was a member of the 188th can look back with fond memories for he did his duty in such a manner that our nation can be proud.

James H. Merryman

Lieutenant General  
US Army Retired



Charles Bagnaschi Collection

Cu Chi - Home of the 25th Infantry Division and the 269th Combat Aviation Battalion, Black Barons.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

DFC Ceremony for action on August 30, 1967. L to R - LTC Merryman, MG Seneff, LTC McWhorter, Maj. Chuck Franklin, Maj. John Zugschwert, and Maj. Joe Sites - @ Cu Chi.

# COMMANDING OFFICERS, 269TH CAB AND ASSIGNED HELICOPTER COMPANYS 1967



Jack Johnson Collection

Left to right standing

1. MAJ. Joseph C. Burns 187th AHC Tay Ninh, 2. LTC James H. Merryman 269th CAB CuChi,
3. MAJ Andrew N. Alford 242nd ASHC CuChi, 4. MAJ Albert R. Woodruff 116th AHC CuChi,

Left to right kneeling

1. MAJ Jack O. Johnson 188th AHC Dau Tieng, 2. CPT Frank T. Peterlin 269th Headquarters & Headquarters Co. CuChi



James Merryman Collection

Black Baron 6 - LTC James H. Merryman standing in front of his C&C Ship (#66-16089) - notice Maltese Cross.



X.O. Joe Sites Collection

Left to right X.O., MAJ. Joe Sites, C.O., LTC James McWhorter with Mail room in the back ground. 188th Company area July 1967.



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS 269TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION  
APO 96353  
"DISCIPLINED PROFESSIONALS"

AVGC-F

14 December 1967

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation

TO: Commanding Officer  
188th Assault Helicopter Company  
APO 96268

1. It gives me great pleasure to commend you and the officers and men of the 188th Assault Helicopter Company on the unit's performance while participating in the conduct of Operation YELLOWSTONE. On the initial day of the largest airmobile operation of its type in aviation history the manner in which your unit conducted its mission was truly exemplary. The devotion to duty of each individual was reflected in the monumental success achieved by the combined effort of the entire airmobile force. You can be justly proud in the part you played in an operation of the complexity, scope, and importance, of YELLOWSTONE.

2. It is truly a privilege to have the 188th Assault Helicopter Company as a unit of this command. The achievements of the Black Baron Battalion can be credited only to the untiring efforts and disciplined professionalism of the units which comprise it. It is with heartfelt gratitude and a deep sense of pride that I commend you on your success.

JAMES H. MERRYMAN  
LTC, Arty  
Commanding



Charles Maurer Collection

From L to R: 188th 2nd Plt. door gunners Ed Pettinato WIA, Ron Carpenter WIA, Dick Detra, and crew chief Jim Trueblood WIA. Notice Buddhist symbol on M60 ammo bag. Black Baron 6 huey in the background.



188th Photo Archive Collection

Black Baron 6 in for repairs at Dau Tieng.

## THE 269<sup>TH</sup> COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION

The achievements of the Black Barons in combat operations from January 1967 through April of 1971 were well known to the troops they supported, and in some circles legendary. In August of 1987 they 269<sup>th</sup> was redesignated as the Headquarters and Headquarters Company for the Black Barons of the 18<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They go by the name "WINGS OF THE DRAGON" today. The text you are about to read covers a window of time...April 1967 through March of 1968, when the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company **BLACK WIDOWS** were assigned to the Black Barons of the 269<sup>th</sup>.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company was first placed on the rolls of the Army on 7 April 1966 and activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on 1 July 1966 for deployment to the combat zone. The unit was first attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps and further attached to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division for training with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion. On 6 January 1967, the unit departed from Pope Air Force Base, Fort Bragg, North Carolina for San Diego, port of embarkation. The unit sailed on 7 January 1967 aboard the USNS General Nelson M. Walker. On 28 January 1967, the unit debarked at Vung Tau, Republic of Vietnam and was then assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group (CAG), 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade on 29 January 1967. Upon arrival at Cu Chi, located thirty miles NW of Saigon and home to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the unit found itself with two standing tents and a large dusty piece of ground as its new home. Little did anyone know at the time that the base camp was built over an extensive Viet Cong tunnel system, in place since World War II, and covered a large portion of the 269<sup>th</sup>'s western III Corps Area of Operation (AO). Headquarters and Headquarters Company commanders were: Captain Darius D. Grogg (1/9/67-6/20/67), Major Dick E. Roach (6/21/67-8/4/67), Captain Ernest D. Sprinkel (8/5/67-1/3/68) and Captain Frank T. Peterlin (1/4/68-5/17/68). The 269<sup>TH</sup> CAB commanders were: Major Richard C. Winesette (7/1/66-8/24/66), LTC Byron E. Sheppard (8/25/66-3/4/67), LTC Robert G. Openshaw (3/5/67-3/29/67), LTC Henry J. Nagao (3/30/67-4/30/67), LTC James H. Merryman (5/1/67-2/1/68), and LTC Edgar F. Todd (2/2/68-7/12/68).

Designated as the primary aviation support battalion to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division "TROPIC LIGHTNING" (aka the "ELECTRIC STRAWBERRY"), the "Black Barons" were consistently committed to the execution of airmobile operations in all the major exercises conducted in the III Corps Tactical Zone. During the airmobile insertions of U.S. and ARVN Forces into the landing zones (LZ) of Junction City II, the Monsoon Campaigns (Kolekole, Diamond Head, and Barking Sands), Manhattan, Atlanta, Saratoga, Yellowstone, TET '68, Resolved To Win, and other numerous operations, Black Baron mettle, although severely tested, proved its strength against the best trained and equipped of the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units. The 269<sup>th</sup> was heavily committed in the terrain of War Zone C&D, the Parrot's Beak, the Fish Hook, Nui Ba Den (Black Virgin mountain), the Hobo, and Boi Loi Woods, the Iron Triangle, the Crescent, the Trapezoid, the Straight Edge Woods, the Razor Backs, the Mushroom, and the Ben Cui, Michelin, and Filhol rubber plantations. From July through December of 1967, the 269<sup>th</sup> earned the distinction of repeatedly flying more combat hours, conducting more combat assaults (CA), hauling more troops, cargo and medevacs than any other combat aviation battalion at that time in the war. Each assault helicopter company consistently averaged over 3,000 flying hours per month and conducted battalion size CA's, comprised of from two to six assault helicopter companies, once ever eighty-nine hours. The employment of Black Baron aircraft in these hotly contested areas listed above definitely took its toll. During that six-month period the intensity of the combat during the 269<sup>th</sup> operations can best be attested to by the amount of damage received from enemy fire to over 296 aircraft.

In fulfilling its tactical missions the 269<sup>th</sup> had six subordinate units: a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, three Assault Helicopter Companies (AHC), one Assault Support Helicopter Company (ASHC), and one Reconnaissance Airplane Company (RAC). The assault helicopter companies' base camps were strategically located to afford the best tactical support to each of the three brigades of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which spanned the entire western breadth of the III Corps AO. Organic to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was the 25<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion, "LOBOS", consisting of Headquarters Company, the "Little Bears" of A Company and the "Diamondhead's" of B Company. The Little Bears provided troop transport, dust off, and resupply. The Diamondhead's were a general support unit that provided gunships and Command and Control (C&C) aircraft for commanders. The "Centaur's" of D Troop, ¾ Cav was an air cavalry troop serving the division. Tactical air support was provided by the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force stationed at various secure bases. The 269<sup>th</sup> worked hand in hand with these units during aerial combat operations.

The 116<sup>th</sup>, 187<sup>th</sup>, and 188<sup>th</sup> AHC's were better known in their tactical environment as the HORNETS, STINGERS, the BLACK HAWKS, RAT PACK, the BLACK WIDOWS, and SPIDERS. They were located at Cu Chi, Tay Ninh and Dau Tieng. Of the three base camps, Dau Tieng was by far the most remote and isolated. Route 239 and 14 were the only roads out of Dau Tieng and open only to armed convoys...a very bad place to be stationed. Route 26 from Tay Ninh connected to Dau Tieng by way of route 239, which was always subject to ambush, sniper fire, land

mines, and acts of sabotage as well as frequent flooding and washouts during the monsoon season. The Class I convoys came out of Saigon, stopping at Cu Chi and Tay Ninh before hitting the end of the line at Camp Rainier which always resulted in spoiled produce and dairy products due to the heat and theft from other units.

The geographical location of the companies permitted a nearly permanent mission assignment for each company to a specific brigade, at least on paper. There were times when each company supported the other two brigades of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> "Fire" brigade consisting of the 1/27 and 2/27 Wolfhounds, the Bobcats of the 1/5 (Mechanized), the 3rd Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry's...McKenzie's Raiders (division ground reconnaissance squadron), F Company, 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry (long-range reconnaissance platoon -LRRP), and F Company, 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Rangers were at Cu Chi within the 116<sup>th</sup>. The 1<sup>st</sup> brigade "Lancers" consisting of the 4/9 Manchus, the 2/14 Golden Dragons, and the Tomahawks of the 4/23 (Mechanized) were at Tay Ninh with the 187<sup>th</sup>. The 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade consisting of the 3/22 and 2/22 (Triple Deuce, Mechanized) Regulars, the 2/12 White Warriors, and the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry scout dog platoon were at Camp Rainier (Dau Tieng) with the 188<sup>th</sup>. This was a time of Search and Destroy, so the above mentioned units didn't spend too much time in their assigned base camps...they were out looking for the communists who had owned this region since the 1920's.

Each company was comprised of 23 slicks and 8 gunships, both of which were UH-1 models of the Bell helicopter. The slicks were armed with two stationery side mounted M-60 machine guns, in the rear gun wells, for the crew chief and door gunner. The gunships were heavily laden with an assortment of weapon systems and a bunji cord attached M-60 machine gun to allow the crew chief and door gunner freedom of movement during fire missions. Monkey straps and bullet proof vests helped keep the guys in back somewhat safe and secure. Weapon systems used on the gunships varied from .50 cal., 20mm canon, 40mm grenade launcher, 2.75 and 3.5-inch rockets, and 7.62 cal. mini-guns. One of the battalion's secret weapons was "BIG DADDY"...an M-39 20mm cannon that had a cyclic rate of 1900 rounds per minute with a maximum effective range of 3500 yards. The ammunition was M-56AZ high explosive incendiary, weighing almost one pound per round and had a bursting radius of 9 meters. It was spin-actuated at about 50 meters and detonated upon contact with anything. The cannon was mounted to the underside of UH-1 #996 on the forward hard points in an inverted position and was fed out the left cargo door through a chute to the weapon. The Stingers used Big Daddy as the third ship in a heavy fire team. The firepower put out was more than sufficient to cover the gunship ahead and at the same time wreak havoc on the target and protect the incoming slicks. The weapon was very reliable and used primarily on trench lines, bunkers, huts, and heavily wooded tree lines. It was SOP to carry four gunners on this huey.

The achievements of the Black Barons in combat operations were well known during that time. The 116<sup>th</sup>, 187<sup>th</sup>, and 188<sup>th</sup> were subjected to the heaviest fire Charlie could deliver on numerous occasions...including .50 cal., 23 and 37mm anti aircraft, SKS, AK-47 and RPD automatic weapons, RPG 2's and 7's, B-40 rockets, 107 and 122mm rockets, and 60 and 82mm mortars. In most cases the four man crew on board did their job and completed the mission, unless of course they were shot down. Although acts of heroism were commonplace within the battalion, the mindset of many was that it was just another day on the job...no big deal. The valor displayed by the helicopter crews and their dedication to the grunts they supported earned them respect, admiration, and gratitude, along with numerous awards.

The "Muleskinners" of the 242nd Assault Support Helicopter Company were stationed at Cu Chi and on a daily basis flew their CH-47 medium cargo helicopters to resupply forward field positions with rations, heavy weapons, ammunition, and all other forms of logistical requirements. The huge chinooks (aka...shit hook) also inserted and extracted large groups of infantry, often while the ground forces were still in heavy enemy contact. The "YOU CALL, WE HAUL" people of the 242nd were a real asset to the 269<sup>th</sup>.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company, "Black Aces", located at Tay Ninh provided a visual reconnaissance capability to most units in the III Corps AO. Day and night the low drone of an O-1 Bird dog could be heard above, as the pilots and observers methodically searched the ground for the elusive enemy. The access of these crews to devastating artillery barrages, fast movers, Spooky and gunship Light and Heavy fire teams made these Black Ace pilots the most formidable and deadly weapons in the battalion.

Another secret weapon was a specially modified smoke ship named "SMOKEY BARON", used extensively on all brigade, battalion, and company size combat assaults. Daily, "Smokey" could be seen shuttling from one operational area to another in support of the battalion's aviation elements. Upon special request from the infantry ground commanders, smoke screens were layed to support an infantry ground move or assist an urgent medevac. Denying the enemy a point blank target capability substantially decreased the number of aircraft losses normally assessed as damage from enemy fire. In fact, not once did an aircraft get shot down in an LZ that was smoked by "Smokey Baron".

The "Cavaliers", a thirteen-man pathfinder detachment, provided navigational assistance and terminal guidance to all of the battalion's aviation elements during daylight and nighttime missions. The pathfinders were utilized in the control of infantry units in the PZ and LZ. Normally inserted into forward field locations hours before an airmobile

operation, the pathfinders were responsible for insuring the correct placement of troops and loads in suitable locations for an airmobile pick-up and heavily committed to the control of logistic moves by elements of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and her sister units. As Cavalier 6, 1<sup>st</sup> LT John Burch, once put it, "The pathfinders function in daytime or nighttime operations is to provide the pilots with accurate and timely tactical information and the ground forces with experienced assistance in the most expeditious manner possible".

The 269<sup>th</sup> staff flight surgeon, responsible for supervising the battalion's three medical detachments and implementing medical policies and guidelines, was Captain Phillip A. Snodgrass. The 431<sup>st</sup> Medical Detachment, under the command of flight surgeon Captain Cage S. Johnson, was responsible for the 116<sup>th</sup> AHC and the 242<sup>nd</sup> ASHC. Captain Lyle A. Parker, commander of the 154<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment, was responsible for 188<sup>th</sup> AHC. The 541<sup>st</sup> Medical Detachment, commanded by Captain John D. Eshelman, was responsible for the 187<sup>th</sup> AHC and the 21<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company. Each detachment had a staff of nine enlisted personnel. Each detachment provided direct medical support to their assigned company and was required to fly with their companies on combat assaults and other direct support missions. In addition, the flight surgeons were responsible for keeping their respective company areas sanitary.

To instill esprit de corps within the companies of the battalion, the 269<sup>th</sup> Information Office published a newspaper called "The Black Baron Release". The newspaper kept everyone abreast of significant events within the 269<sup>th</sup>.

The Black Barons conducted their first CA on April 14, 1967. By January 1968, they had been committed to 46-battalion size and hundreds of company size CA's, rightfully earning them the title of the "DISCIPLINED PROFESSIONALS". They also supported the 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, the 199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade, the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, and Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), the Australian Task Force, and the Tiger and White Horse Division's of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army. The magnitude of these airmobile operations required the frequent attachment of companies and, in some cases, entire aviation battalions, placing over 150 aircraft in the air at one time.

From 1 May of 1967 until 25 January 1968, under the command of LTC James H. Merryman, aircraft of the 269<sup>th</sup> flew 278,909 sorties, logged 93,656 cumulative flying hours, carried 418,411 passengers and moved 43,603 tons of cargo in support of ground forces. The greatest accomplishment for the Black Baron aircrews was the 960 WIA that they med-evac'd from the jungle battlefield to the closest Evac hospital. During this period Black Baron aircrews killed 960 of the Viet Cong/NVA forces (body count), while suffering 20 KIA and 119 WIA. This number was far more than most infantry brigades had accounted for. During this time frame 447 aircraft received combat damage from hits received by enemy ground fire.

In December of 1967 the 269<sup>th</sup> Black Barons supported the combined forces of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 25<sup>th</sup> Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Infantry Division during the conduct of Operation Yellowstone in War Zone C, near the Cambodian border. The operation utilized aircraft representative of the current Army inventory at that time, to lift two infantry brigades, with supporting elements, and an ARVN force consisting of one ARVN battalion and three Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) companies into an area of operation (AO) and would establish the CIDG camp at Katum. The units OPCON to the 269<sup>th</sup> for this huge operation of over 150 aircraft were the: 173<sup>rd</sup> AHC Robin Hoods/Crossbows, 128<sup>th</sup> AHC Tomahawks/Gunslingers, 162<sup>nd</sup> AHC Vultures/Copperheads, 205<sup>th</sup> ASHC Geronimos (CH-47), 213<sup>th</sup> ASHC Black Cats and 2/478<sup>th</sup> Horse Shoes (CH-54 sky crane -TARHE). The support during Yellowstone was one of the largest commitments of an aviation battalion to an airmobile operation in the history of combat assaults. Six assault helicopter companies were used to insert the combined force. Concurrent with the assaults, an enormous logistic airlift was conducted using 33 CH-47 helicopters and a platoon of CH-54 sky cranes. A total of 200 logistic sorties were flown from rear base camps to forward field locations in a steady flow of aircraft maintaining a planned 2-minute separation. The combined use of UH-1 aircraft for assaults and cargo helicopters in resupply activities succeeded in placing in the operational area a large number of maneuver forces and an immense combat support and combat service support back-up in a manner of a few hours.

Around noon, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1968, MG Robert R. Williams (Hawk 6), commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade called LTC James H. Merryman (Black Baron 6) and ordered him to get all of his gunships on the ground. If possible, he wanted all the gunships flyable, because they were going to be attacked that night and a major battle would occur the next day. True to his word, the first rockets of the TET offensive slammed into Cu Chi at 0200 hours on February 1, 1968. The 116<sup>th</sup> company area took direct hits, killing some and wounding others. As soon as Merryman arrived in the 116<sup>th</sup> company area, a wide-eyed Hornet 6 watched over the shoulder of Black Baron 6 as a rocket exploded on the road behind him, close to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Headquarters. Shortly after the rocket and mortar attack, Merryman got the call to place the Spiders, Stingers and Rat Pack under the operational control of the 3/4 Cav's "McKenzie's Raiders", commanded by LTC Glenn Otis. Later that day, McKenzie's Raider's, supported by the gunships of the 269<sup>th</sup> prevented the Viet Cong from taking Tan Son Nhut airbase. During



the TET offensive the 269<sup>th</sup> worked exclusively in the Cu Chi-Saigon area. The aviation support by the Black Barons was instrumental in the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's counter offensive actions in opening Highway 1 between Saigon and Cu Chi and the actual securing of Saigon. The base camps at Dau Tieng, Tay Ninh and Cu Chi were hit hard with rocket and mortar fire on a daily basis during the communist offensive. Vicious battles were fought by elements of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Cu Chi City, Ap Cho and Hoc Mon. In one operation, Tan Son Nhut airbase was used as the LZ for the grunts. As the enemy action of TET '68 slowly lost its punch, the 269<sup>th</sup> provided support to the various allied units during Operation Resolved To Win. This highly successful action was designed to remove the enemy forces that were still in positions around the Saigon, Long Binh and Bien Hoa area. On 72 separate CA's, the companies of the 269<sup>th</sup> flew a combined total of 25,585 sorties, carried 47,123 passengers, transported 7,185 tons of cargo, for a total of 9,144 flying hours. The Spiders, Stingers and Rat Pack accounted for 131 confirmed kills, along with another 104 estimated kills. The gunships destroyed 163 sampans and structures. The 269<sup>th</sup> suffered 9 WIA and sustained combat damage to 64 aircraft from enemy ground fire during the battle. Through skill, courage and determination, the officers and men of the "DISCIPLINED PROFESSIONALS" provided the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and other allied units the necessary aviation support to completely decimate the VC and NVA units in the western III Corps, during the communist "TET '68" offensive...the bloodiest of the war.

The 269<sup>th</sup> was in all respects a thoroughly professional combat aviation battalion. Its accomplishments were vast in scope and quite varied in nature. The full success of the battalion was attributed to the men who formed it, who comprised it, and who fought to make it what it was. Above all things it was a lasting tribute to the spirit of Army aviation in the Republic of Vietnam. The Black Barons can best be summed up by their motto and the goal of every man assigned: "Aim High".

Source: Spider door gunner, Dick "Cherry Boy" Detra, 1967-1968.

### THE BLACK BARONS' MALTESE CROSS

Major Roger Waterbury was in command of the first group of headquarters personnel, which flew from Fort Bragg, North Carolina to San Diego, California. During the flight a stewardess, learning of the unit's destination, approached Major Waterbury and presented him with a black scarf for good luck. On the ensuing voyage, Major John Zugschwert along with other staff officers exchanged ideas for a name to go with the 269<sup>th</sup>'s numerical designation. A decision was made to incorporate the new 269<sup>th</sup> commander, LTC Byron E. Sheppard's first name with Major Waterbury's lucky black scarf. As a result, the name **BLACK BARONS** was born.

The 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company, 187<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company and the 21<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company also used the black theme in choosing their tactical designations. A couple of cherry, wobbly ones from the 188<sup>th</sup> came up with the name **BLACK WIDOWS** and staying within that context the gun platoon chose **SPIDERS**. Pilots from the 21<sup>st</sup> picked a good one for their name, the **BLACK ACES**. The 187<sup>th</sup>, which formed up at Fort Bragg with the 269<sup>th</sup>, knew that they would be assigned to the battalion when they arrived in country and chose **BLACK HAWKS** as their tactical name. The 187<sup>th</sup> were known as the **BLACK HAWKS** from February 1967 thru December 1967, when they had to change their name when a new Air Cav unit arrived in December of 1967. This unit, whose historical lineage went back further than the 187<sup>th</sup>, was also known as the **BLACK HAWKS**. So the 187<sup>th</sup> changed their name to the **CRUSADERS**. The 116<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company **HORNETS** and the 242<sup>nd</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company **MULESKINNERS** had established tactical names prior to joining the battalion.

In May of 1967, LTC James H. Merryman took command of the 269<sup>th</sup>. In chronological order Black Baron 6's staff included: Black Baron 5 (XO) Major Dick Roach, LTC Arthur A. Dalone, LTC Irwin K. Cockett (WIA 1/5/68 while flying Smokey the Baron II in support of the 188<sup>th</sup> and would have become Merryman's replacement as CO if he hadn't been evacuated back to the states) and LTC Edgar F. Todd. Black Baron 1- (S-1) Captain John B. Pearson Jr; Major Stephen J. Fersch, Major Charles Graham, Black Baron 2- (S-2) Captain Matt R. Kambrod, Captain Lyndon E. Holloman. Black Baron 3- (S-3) Major Art Dalone, Major John F. Zugschwert, Major Billy G. Sims. Black Baron 4- (S-4) Major George W. Moses and Major Joe Sites. Subordinate unit commanders during this time frame were, Headquarters and Headquarters company: Captain Darius Grogg, Major Dick E. Roach, Captain Ernest Sprinkel, and Captain Frank Peterlin. 116<sup>th</sup> AHC, (Hornet 6) Major Harold I. Small, Major Charles D. Franklin and Captain Albert R. Woodruff. 187<sup>th</sup> AHC, (Black Hawk 6) Major Albert B. McClintock, Major William F. Bauman, Major Joseph C. Burns and Russell J. Folta. 188<sup>th</sup> AHC, (Black Widow 6) Major Bobby Wolford, Major John H. McWhorter, Jr., and Major Jack O. Johnson. 21<sup>st</sup> RAC, (Black Ace 6) Major Ernest C. Strum and the 242<sup>nd</sup> ASHC, (Muleskinner 6) Major Paul L. Stansel and Major Andrew N. Alford.

LTC Merryman believed "That a commander had to make damn sure that his command accomplished its mission in a professional manner which would reduce the bodily harm to his men. This could not be done by running a popularity contest". He was very demanding and tough on his company commanders and staff, but not in a mean or nasty way. The original members of the 269<sup>th</sup> incorporated the Maltese Cross with the silly distinctive insignia

authorized by the Institute of Heraldry into a medal disc and cloth pocket patch. The Maltese Cross was also used as nose and door art on Black Baron 6's brand new UH-1H C&C helicopter (#66-16089), which was on loan from the 188<sup>th</sup>. Both Smokey Baron I and II smoke ships used the Maltese Cross as nose art. The following correspondence between the Institute of Heraldry and LTC Merryman and his predecessor LTC Edgar F. Todd is worth mentioning.

14 December 1967

SUBJECT: Battalion Crest

FROM: LTC James H. Merryman, Commander, 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion

TO: The Institute of Heraldry, Washington D.C.

The 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, activated in June of 1966, arrived in the Republic of Vietnam in January of 1967. At approximately the same time, prior to the battalion's baptism of fire, it had received from the Institute of Heraldry an official crest as a symbol identifying the unit. Shortly thereafter, the battalion adopted the title of Black Barons, which immediately became the unit's tactical designation. To complement the Black Baron theme, a Maltese Cross was chosen as the insignia identifying all battalion aircraft. The combination, it was felt, would insure the perpetuation of the Black Baron concept. The Department of the Army later authorized the title of Black Barons as the "Distinctive Designation" of the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB. Sequentially, the battalion adopted a motto, AIM HIGH, which serves not only as a keynote to battalion operations, but also as a salutation conjunctive with a hand salute and a phrase prevalent on the lips of each member of the unit. None of these items, however, is incorporated into the design of the official battalion crest.

Enclosed is a metal disc pocket patch, which is presently worn by all members of this staff. It is requested that a new crest be designed to include all the items visible on the pocket patch, with emphasis placed on the Department of the Army authorized "Distinctive Designation", Black Barons. It is desired that the crest include the basic Maltese Cross. The center portion within the cross should include the words AIM HIGH, the battalion motto. The title, Black Barons, found below the cross, serves as the tactical designation of the unit in its present combat environment. It is by this title that the battalion is continually referred to in the planning and conduct of all of its airmobile operations. The Department of the Army "Distinctive Designation" has, in fact, acquired more frequent usage in referring to the battalion, than has the unit's numerical designation. The primary desire of the battalion is basically to have its crest redesigned to either duplicate or closely approximate the enclosed metal disc pocket patch.

The original crest designed by the Institute of Heraldry was never manufactured or purchased as insignia by personnel of the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB. Therefore, the awarding of a new crest will no way constitute a pecuniary imposition on any member of this command. The 269<sup>th</sup> CAB has integrated the Black Baron concept into the foundation of a proud heritage built on achievements. It is felt that the design of a new crest is warranted and necessary to further establish the traditions of this very proud unit. Your assistance in the design of a new crest will be greatly appreciated.

8 January 1968

SUBJECT: Battalion Crest

FROM: Colonel Ed V. Hendren, Jr., Commanding, The Institute of Heraldry, Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia

TO: LTC James H. Merryman, 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, APO SF 96353

The design developed by the staff of this Institute of the distinctive insignia authorized for the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion was submitted to the battalion on 22 August 1966. Your organization concurred in the design on 29 August 1966. As a result of this concurrence the distinctive insignia was authorized and hubs and dies were developed. The development of hubs and dies is at the expense of the US Government and was completed in February 1967. The authorized distinctive insignia is enlarged and appliquéd to the base of the distinguishing flag authorized for your battalion. A new distinctive insignia would obsolete hubs and dies and would also make the distinguishing flag, manufactured just a year ago, obsolete. In view of the above, the request for a new distinctive insignia cannot be favorably considered at this time.

12 March 1968

SUBJECT: Battalion Crest

FROM: LTC Edgar F. Todd, Commander, 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion

TO: The Institute of Heraldry, Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia 22314

I request reconsideration for a change of the unit crest for the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion Black Barons. Since arrival in Vietnam the black Baron battalion has enjoyed a reputation as one of the finest combat aviation battalions in Vietnam. The distinctive recognition of a Black Baron is the Maltese Cross and our adopted motto, AIM HIGH. The combat achievements and spirit that prevails in this organization is indicative of our accomplishments. All members of this organization have worn the accepted recognition of the pocket patch as shown by the attached disc with pride and esprit de corps. To change from the present crest worn to that, which was originally authorized, would cause this battalion to lose its identity. I request that new hubs and dies be made and a new flag be issued to the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB. If funding is the deciding factor, I request that you advise me if there is any way that the Black Barons could reimburse the US Government for the development of the new hubs and dies that would be required.

3 April 1968

SUBJECT: Battalion Crest

FROM: LTC G.W. Dundas, Commanding, The Institute of Heraldry, Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia 22314

TO: LTC Edgar F. Todd, Commander, 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, APO SF 96353

Your desire to have the 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion's distinctive insignia revised to illustrate your accomplishments as a combat unit is recognized. However, an authorized insignia cannot be changed to reflect a unit's achievements after authorization of the insignia. It is understood that an organization will continue to develop history and traditions after its insignia is approved. Battle honors achieved subsequent to authorization of the distinctive insignia are adequately reflected in the display of streamers on the distinguishing flag. It has been the experience of this Institute that new designs of insignia seem alien to the units for which they are authorized: it is only after association with the unit that the design becomes accepted and recognized by the troops and public.

Additionally, the Department of the Army General Staff has authorized the unit designation to be placed on the distinguishing flag for flexible battalions. However, the flags, which have been issued without unit designations, will not be replaced until they become unserviceable. In view of the foregoing comments, we regret that your request for reconsideration of change of distinctive insignia may not be considered favorably. The metal disc pocket patch is not authorized. Only those items approved by the Department of the Army may be worn on the uniform. It is recommended that the Black Maltese Cross not be used by your organization. This device has already been used, and is recognized as a German aircraft marking of World War I and II, therefore it is not distinctive to your battalion.

On his return home, in February 1968, LTC Merryman made a special trip to the Institute of Heraldry at Cameron Station in yet another attempt to get the Maltese Cross incorporated into the official distinctive insignia. The officer in command was convinced that the World War I and II veterans would always associate the Maltese Cross with Nazi Germany and said, "NOT A CHANCE". To those who put their lives on the line while serving with the **BLACK BARONS**, the Maltese Cross will always be a part of the distinctive insignia. LTC Merryman rose quickly through the ranks, serving a second tour in Vietnam as Commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group from April 1971 through March 1972. He also served as the Commanding General, of the US Army Aviation Center from December 1978 through August 1980. He retired in August 1984 wearing the three stars of a Lieutenant General...not bad for the commander of the 269<sup>th</sup> Black Barons.

Source: Black Baron 6, LTG James H. Merryman, Black Baron 3 Colonel John Zugschwert, 25<sup>th</sup> ID yearbook 67-68, 269<sup>th</sup> Operational Report Lessons Learned, May 1967-February 1968, 12<sup>th</sup> CAG newspaper, Black Jack Flier, volume 1 No. 5 & 6, February/March 1968.



US Army Photo

Black Widows picking up 25th ARVN troops at Katum during Operation Yellowstone. Dec. '67. Lead ship is 2nd plts' own, #66-16119 Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.



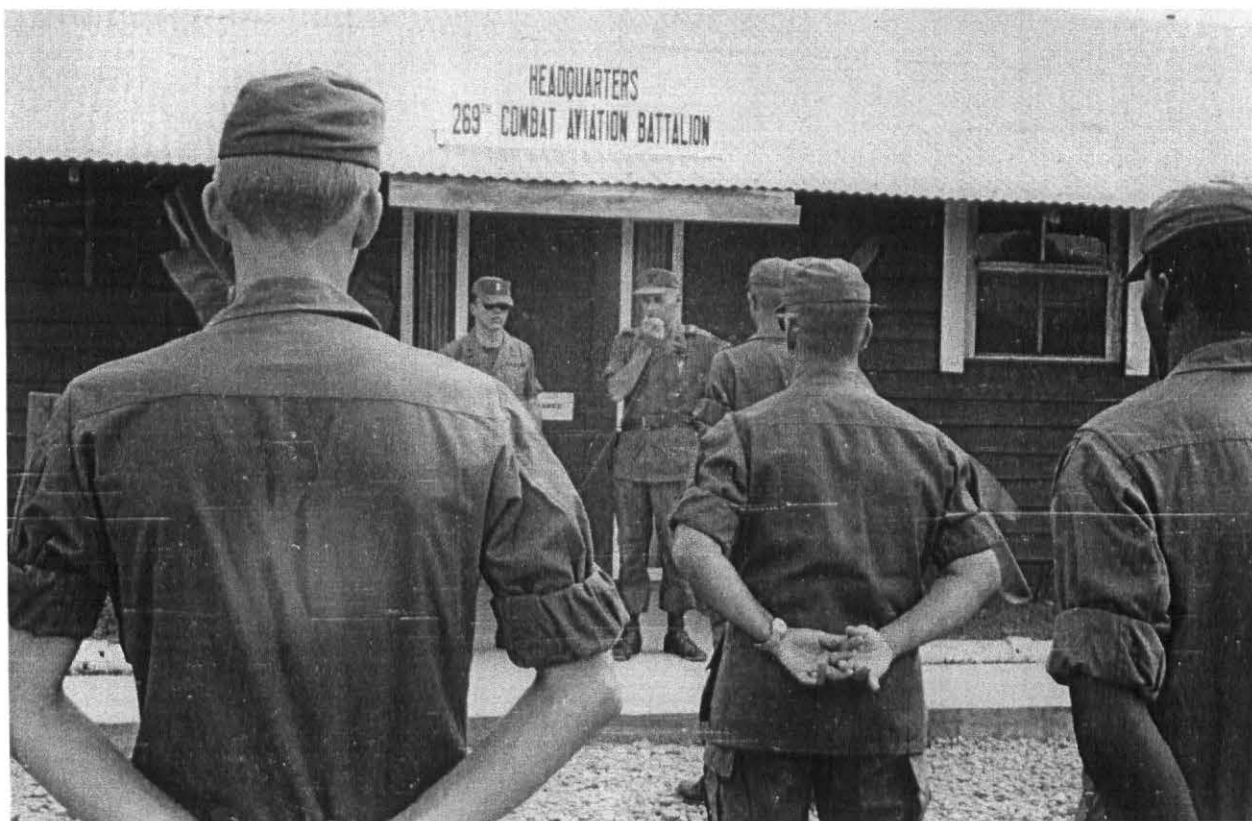
US Army Photo

Black Widows were the lead company on this combat assault, using Katum as the PZ loading 25th ARVN troops, during Operation Yellowstone.



US Army Photo

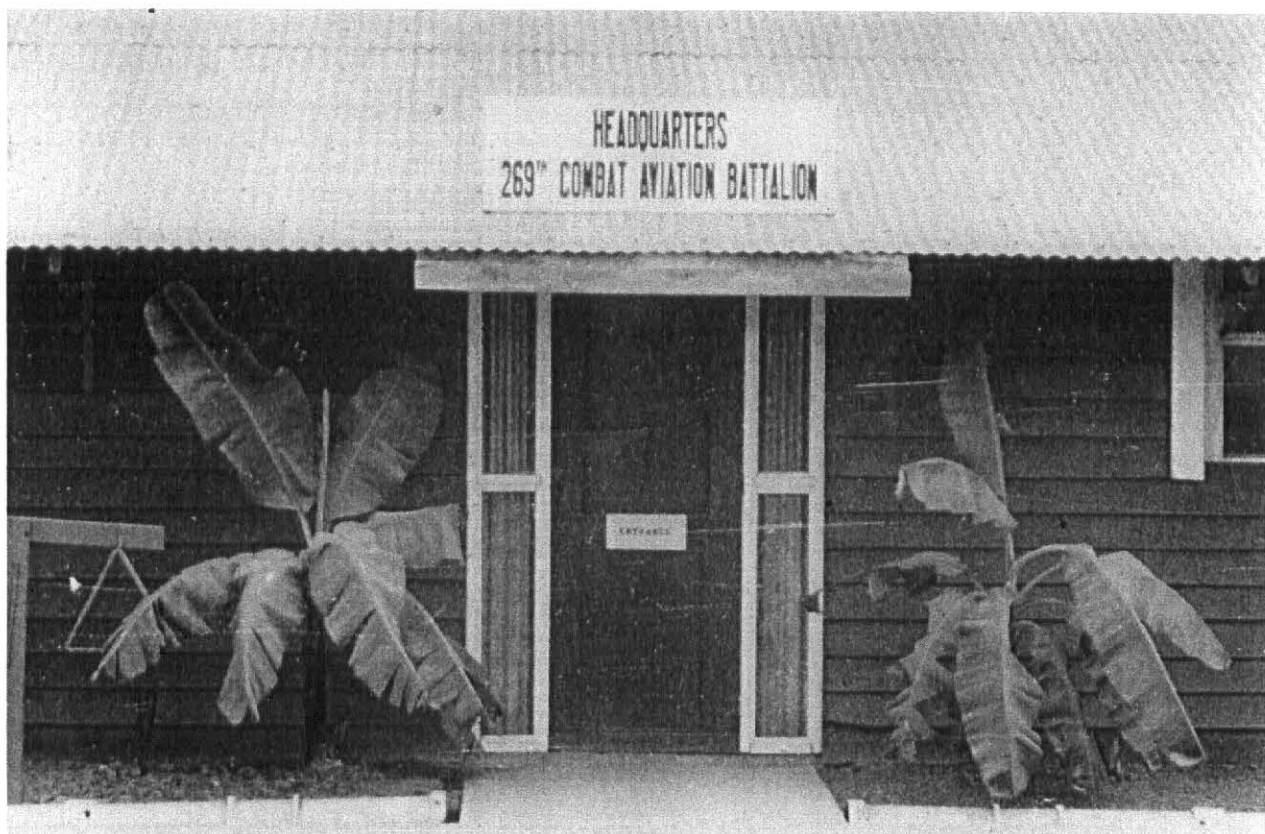
A CH-47 from the 242nd ASHC, Muleskinners, comes to the rescue!



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

LTC James Merryman addressing his troops in front of the 269th headquarters.





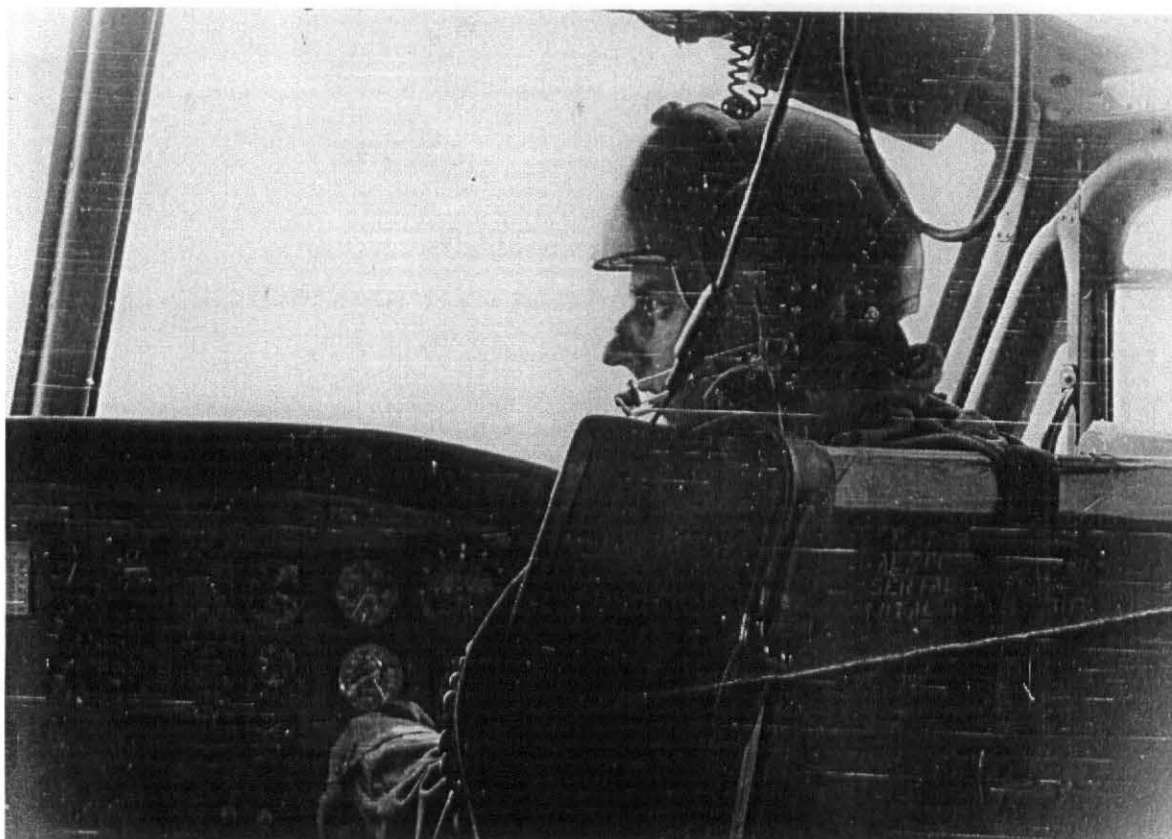
Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

269th CAB Headquarters, Cu Chi Notice banana palms located next to the main entrance.



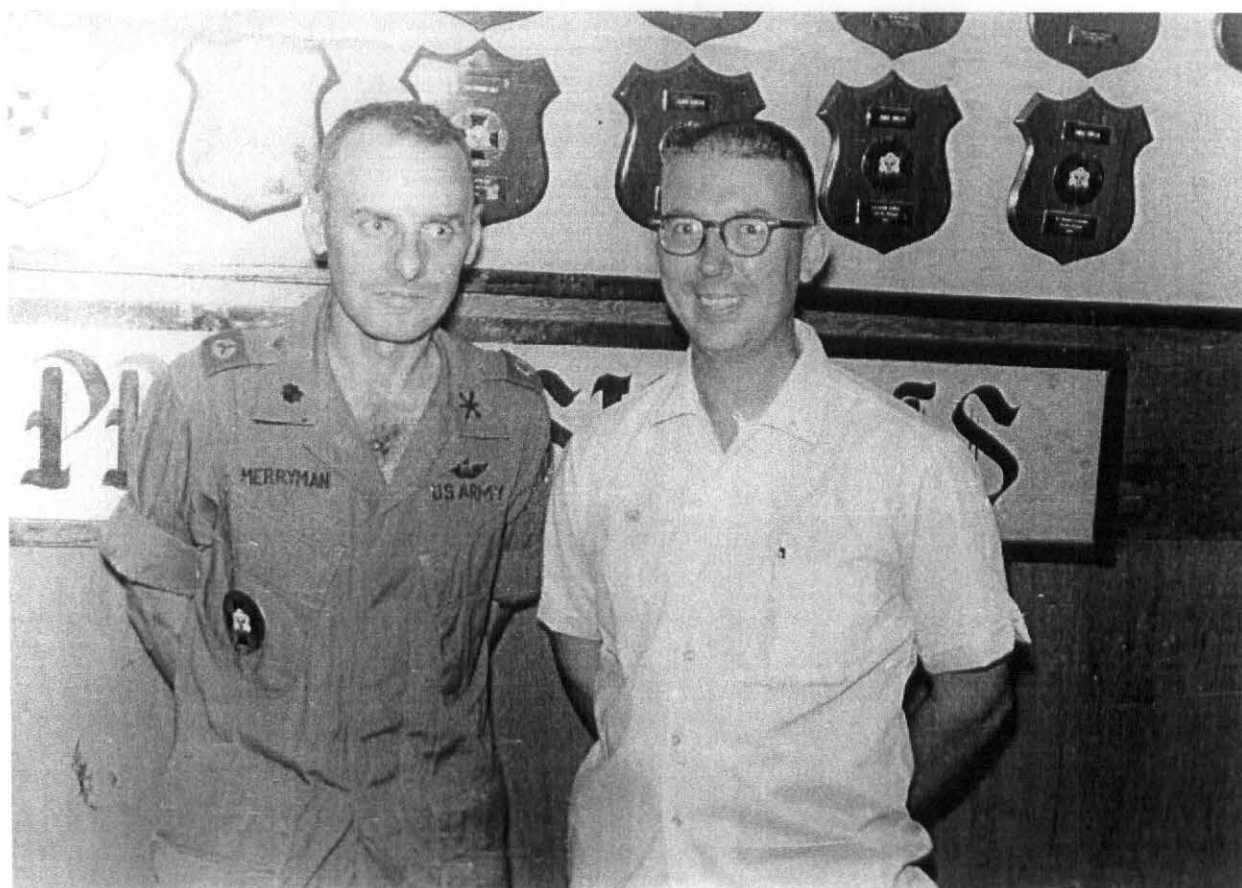
Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

Signs and plaques displayed in the 269th Officers' Club, the Black Baron Retreat.



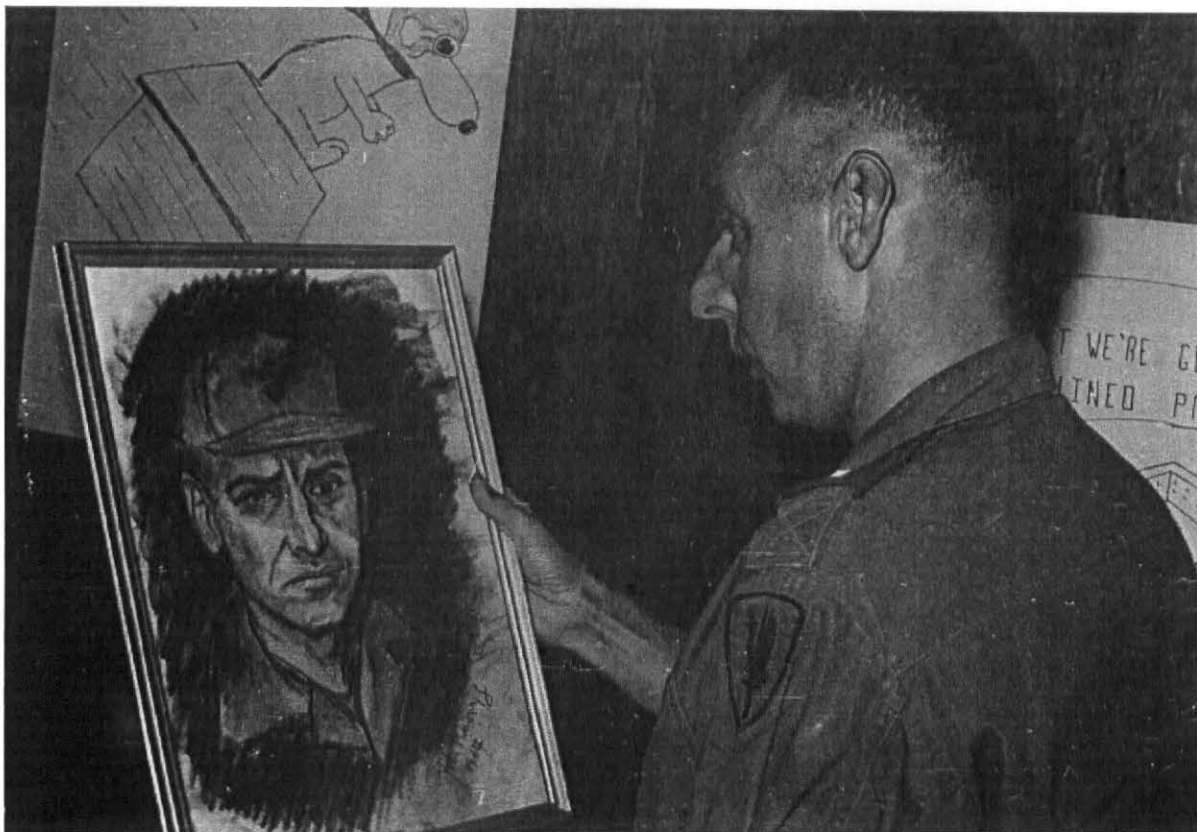
Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

Profile shot of LTC James H. Merryman in the cockpit of his C&C Ship.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

Black Baron 6 and former 154th medical detachment flight surgeon Phillip Snodgrass, who became the battalion flight surgeon in Dec. '67.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

LTC Merryman (with tears in his eyes) as he looks at a charcoal sketch of himself, which was done by SP/5 John Morrissey as a parting gift from the troops, in Feb. '68.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

The Smokey Baron Boyz from L to R: crew chief Sp/5 Phillip Busby, AC Black Baron 6, pilot Maj. Jack McKnight, and door gunner Sp/5 Paul Geving at the Web - Dau Tieng, Dec. '67.





Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

From L to R: MG George P. Seneff, commander of the 1st Aviation Brigade, Col Psaki, commander of the 12th CAG, and LTC James H. Merryman as MG Seneff bids farewell to the 269th on 5 Sep. 1967.



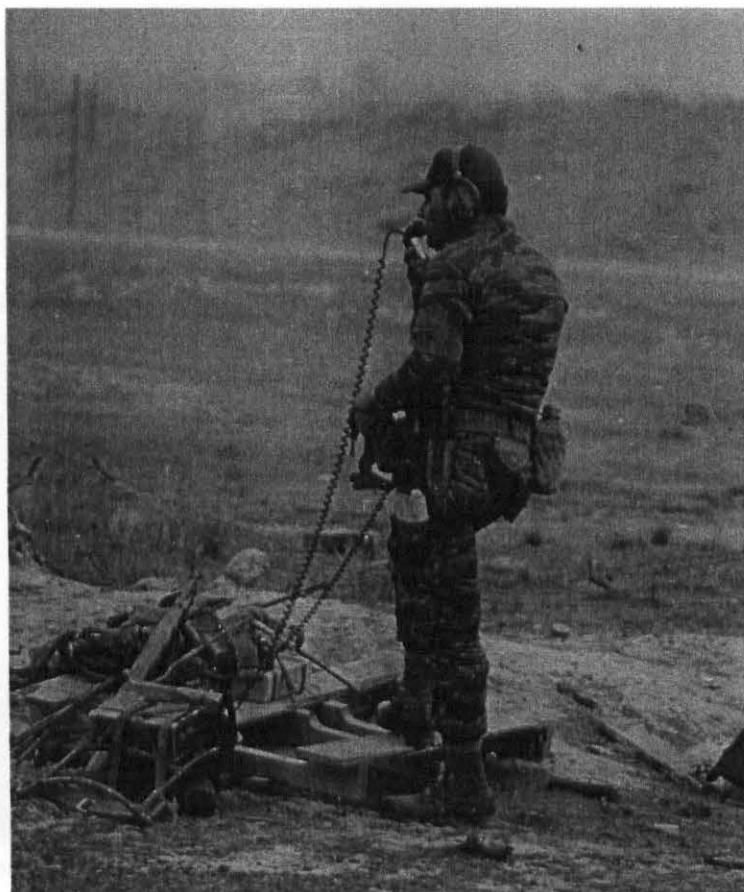
Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

The Cavaliers of the 269th Pathfinder Detachment are waiting to be picked up at Cu Chi. Sp/4 Carpenter is facing the camera, and to his left is Sp/4 Ballou.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

From L to R: Sgt. Carpenter, 1Lt. Burch, and Native American Indian Chiarra of the Cavaliers.



Joe Stahlkuppe Collection

Native American Indian Chiarra is making radio contact with a ground element during a 269th operation, Nov. '67.





**BLACK BARON COUNTRY**  
 WESTERN III CORPS AREA OF OPERATIONS - BLUE HIGHLIGHT SAIGON & ORIENTAL RIVERS  
 INFILTRATION CORRIDORS FROM CAMBODIA TOWARD SAIGON  
 SOURCE: LTG JAMES H. MERRYMAN

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS 269TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION  
APO 96353  
"DISCIPLINED PROFESSIONALS"

AVGC-F

13 March 1968

SUBJECT: Letter of Commendation


Commanding Officer  
188th Assault Helicopter Company  
APO 96268

1. On the occasion of the departure of the 188th Assault Helicopter Company from this command, I take pleasure in extending to you personally and to all officers and men of the Black Widows my congratulations for outstanding performance of duty and my sincere appreciation for the many fine missions performed by your command.

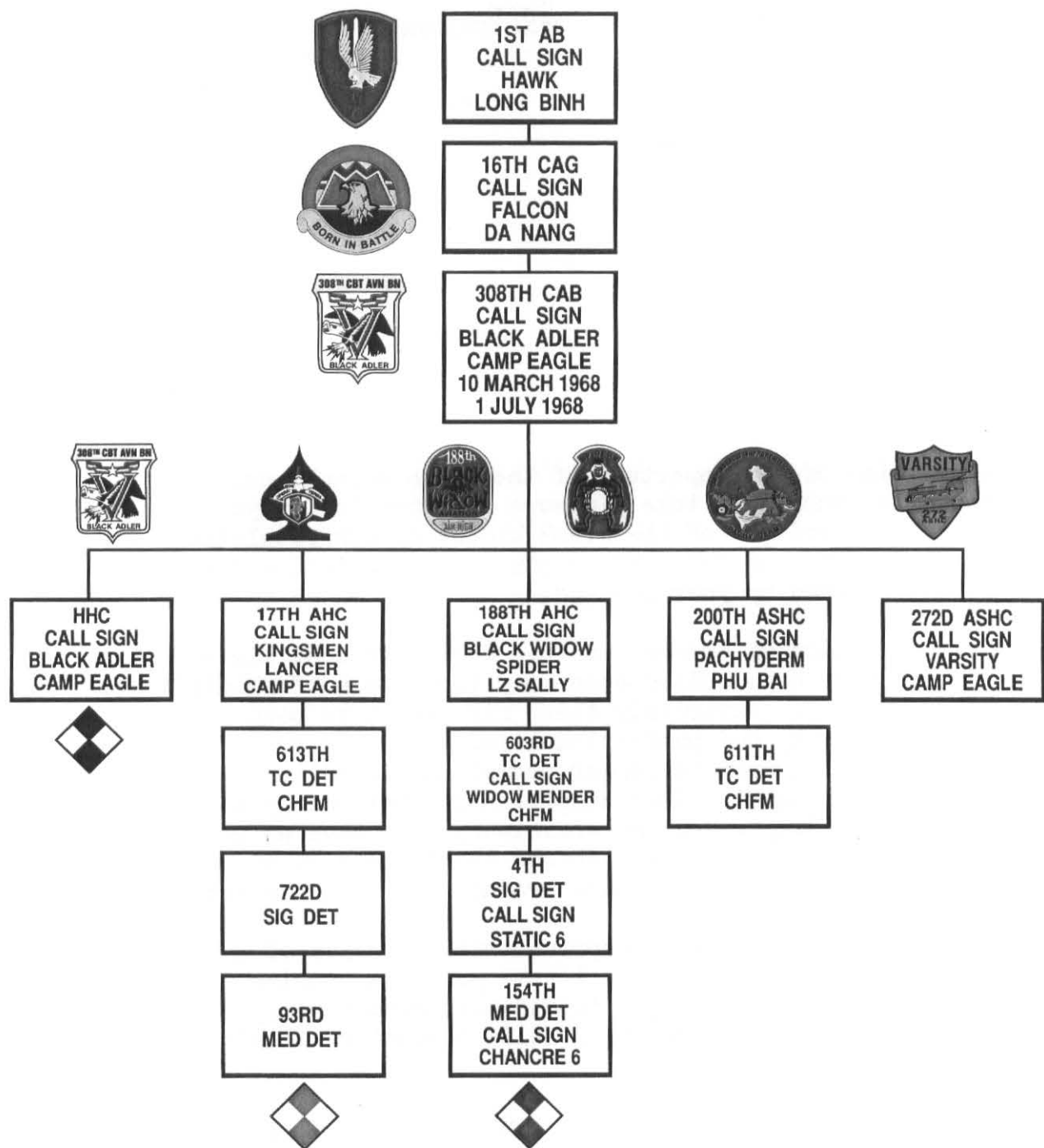
2. Since my assumption of command of this Battalion some six weeks ago the Black Widows have been called upon many times to perform difficult and dangerous missions. Invariably these missions have been performed with high skill, daring, and professionalism. Time and again, your company has been called upon to render prompt and immediate support to other units of this command. This support has consistently been given with the same outstanding speed and efficiency that have so characterized all Black Widow activities. These actions are indicative of high morale, esprit and devotion to duty. All are products of solid leadership.

3. Loss of the Black Widows will deprive this Battalion of a valuable asset not easily replaced. However, I take pride in knowing that the Black Adlers are receiving a tough, dependable, combat ready company, which can be depended upon to render a solid account of itself in all situations.

4. Again, I commend you and the entire company for a job well done and wish you continued success in all future endeavors.

  
EDGAR F. TODD  
LTC, Arty  
Commanding

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHAIN OF COMMAND



The 308th CAB aircraft markings consisted of a diamond divided diagonally to form four diamonds, each company was assigned a distinctive color within the diamond configuration for visual identification.

## LISTEN UP

1ST AB - 1st AVIATION BRIGADE, LARGEST ARMY COMBAT COMMAND IN VIETNAM.

AHC - ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY

ASHC - ASSAULT SUPPORT HELICOPTER COMPANY

CAB - COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION, I CORPS

CAG - COMBAT AVIATION GROUP

CHFM - CARGO HELICOPTER FIELD MAINTENANCE

HHC - HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

MED DET - MEDICAL DETACHMENT

SIG DET - SIGNAL DETACHMENT

TC DET - TRANSPORTATION COMPANY DETACHMENT

SOURCE: 16th CAG (ORLL's) 30 April 1968, 308th CAB Quarterly Report, Operational Report 30 April 1968



## **16th Combat Aviation Group (CAG)**

On 1 August 1967 the Army's Falcon Combat Aviation Group was activated at An Son 17 miles northwest of Qui Nhon and was attached to the 1st Aviation Brigade. The new group was an offshoot of the 17th Group and had grown from three to six battalions including the newly formed 212th and 268th. The addition of the Falcon group was expected to shorten the chain of command and ease the administrative burden that existed on the 17th Group Headquarters. The idea was to take over from three to five of the combat battalions administration, staff planning, and control problems. At the time it was activated LTC Joseph W. Waterbury assumed command.

The 16th CAG, during that period, was under operational control of the CG, III MAF with the organizational mission of providing command (less operational control), administration, technical supervision and professionalism of all non-divisional US Army units in the I CTZ. The units first quarter of operations were characterized by the utilization of the group's assets to provide aviation support throughout the I CTZ. Major activities were high-lighted by divisional operations along the mountain ranges bordering the coastal plains from Khe Sanh to Ba To. In support of these divisional operations the three battalions of the group were actively involved with combat assaults, troop lifts, resupply, repositioning of artillery units (including the 155 HOW battery by use of the CH-47B helicopter) and extensive use of the group's visual reconnaissance and surveillance capability.

16th CAG	
HHC	Da Nang
14th CAB	Chu Lai
212th CSAB	Da Nang
308th CAB	Camp Eagle

The group's three Army Aviation Elements (AAE's), provided necessary liaison and timely recommendations concerning the most effective and appropriate utilization of Army Aviation to the CG III Marine Amphibious Force, the CG of the First Marine Air Wing, and the CO I Corps Advisory Group. A warning order attaching the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion was received on 9 March 1968. The order called for the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion to be detached from its parent unit, the 12th Combat Aviation Group and be attached to the 16th Combat Aviation Group effective 15 March 1968, with operational control invested to the 101st Airborne Division. Attachment became effective as the units passed North of 14 degrees 30 minutes North latitude. The 308th Combat Aviation Battalion completed its move from the III Corps area to Camp Eagle in the I Corps area and was declared fully operational on 12 April 1968. With the exception of the time spent in moving the 308th CAB from III CTZ to I CTZ, the Group's units were continually engaged in combat aviation support activities.

Other items such as civic action projects and training were integrated into daily activities.

Below are significant activities, during operations involving the 308th CAB, 14th CAB, and the 212 CSAB:

1. Increased support of Prairie Fire operations from the Phu Bai FOB and the evacuation of Kham Duc Special Forces Camp.
2. Establishment of radio relay, and command and control aircraft support for Prairie Fire operations.
3. Flight Following and Air/Fire Support Coordination instructions for I CTZ were updated.
4. Helipad directory for I CTZ was updated.
5. Coordinated helicopter support of 1st Marine Division operations Mameluke Thrust, Allen brook, and Swift Saber. These operations involved the clearing of areas 15 - 20 miles around Da Nang.
6. Coordinated helicopter support of Operation Eager Yankee in the TF X-Ray coastal area. This operation involved extensive helicopter borne operations in the 3rd Marine Division area.
7. Re-evaluation of aerial surveillance (OV-1) aircraft missions to effect improved support for PCV.

I Corps AAE: Action undertaken by the I Corps AAE during the period 1 May 1968 - 31 July 1968 that are worthy of note follow:

1. Increased VNAF support of ARVN combat operations. Close liaison between the I Corps AAE, I Corps G3 Air Advisor and Air Force Advisory Team #5 (AFAT 5) has resulted in a marked increase of VNAF helicopter support of ARVN combat operations. VNAF helicopters have participated with 16th Gp Aslt Helicopters in all ARVN combat assaults during this reporting period with the exception of one operation where the LZ's were not capable of accommodating CH-34 helicopters.
2. Increased helicopter support for Province Advisors. Senior Advisor of Quang Nam Province and Quang Tin Province are now being supported daily by helicopters OPCON to the Commanding Officer, I Corps Advisory Group. Senior Advisors of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, and Quang Ngai Provinces are receiving helicopter support from Provisional Corps Vietnam and the American Division on a daily basis. This arrangement for helicopter support of Province Senior Advisors was approved by the Commanding General, III MAF and resulted in a marked increase of helicopter flying time available to Province Senior Advisors.

AAE, FMAW: The AAE, FMAW was actively engaged in the planning and execution of the following significant activities:

1. A UH-1 pilot exchange program between FMAW and 1st ACD (1/9th CAV) was effected during the period 1 May - 10 June 1968. The purpose of this program was to evaluate operating procedures of the 1/9th CAV for possible adoption by Marine Forces. Although Marine reports were critical on some areas of operational procedures, they recommended that the exchange program be continued.

2. Operation Duckblind, which was in the planning stage for two months, became operational on 15 July 1968. The Army provided two officers and one EM to give technical assistance, equipment support, and crew training to the Marine personnel involved in the operation.
3. Operation Thor: Army aircraft were used to support this operation as required visual reconnaissance aircraft requirements were beyond the capabilities of Marine assets.
4. The AAE was involved in a study to determine the visual reconnaissance/observation requirements for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Divisions.
5. Conducted briefings for Marine Staff Personnel on the intelligence gathering capabilities of the OV-1 and the capabilities of the OH-6 observation helicopter.

Source: US Army, Institute of Heraldry

### **159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion**

The mission of the 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion was to provide tactical air movement of combat troops, supplies and equipment in airmobile operations within combat zone.

The 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion was assigned to the 101<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division effective 1 July 1968 and was redesignated the 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion on 20 July 1968 with an effective date of 1 July 1968. Operational control of the 17<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company and 188<sup>th</sup> Assault helicopter Company was released to the 101<sup>st</sup> Assault Helicopter Battalion, 160<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group on 20 July 1968. The 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion consisted of:

- (1) Headquarters and Headquarters Company
- (2) Company A, 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company (Formerly the 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC), 16-CH47A
- (3) 611<sup>th</sup> TC Detachment (Deactivated on 1 July 1968, Reactivated as, Aircraft Maintenance Team KF, TBA.)
- (4) Company B, 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company (Formerly the 272<sup>nd</sup> ASHC), 16-CH47B
- (5) 362<sup>nd</sup> TC Detachment. (Deactivated on 1 July 18, Reactivated as, Aircraft Maintenance team KF, TBA.)

Aircraft availability in Company C, 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion (formerly the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company) has improved greatly during the period. This improvement is the result of a very aggressive maintenance effort within the unit. Light discipline continues to limit the night maintenance program; however, the unit has been able to partially overcome this problem through improved management and supervision of the maintenance man-hours available.

Services from the 339<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (ADS) were made available after the unit became established at Red Beach. Maintenance and repair parts support from this unit had been an important factor in the improved aircraft availability rates. CH-47 repair items continue to require excessive order and grip time which had a marked influence on Company aircraft availability rates.

Aircraft should not operate between 50 feet and 1500 feet unless transitioning for landing or climbing to cruise altitude. If weather conditions precluded flight above 1500 feet, nap-of-the-earth techniques should be utilized to reduce hit probability.

Source: Operational Report of 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion for Period Ending 30 April 1968

### **159<sup>th</sup> ASSAULT SUPPORT HELICOPTER BATTALION 101<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division**

#### **Operational Report of 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion for period ending 31 July 1968, RCS, CS, FOR-6**

The 188<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 200<sup>th</sup> had two civilian contractors from DYNA-ELECTRON assigned to each unit for technical support. The 272<sup>nd</sup> ASHC was assigned to the 308<sup>th</sup> on 6 June 1968. Listed under casualties were the six personnel from the 17<sup>th</sup> who went\* Missing in Action during Operation Delaware on 21 April 1968. These men would be the only MIA's lost in combat operations, during the 188<sup>th</sup>'s time in country with the 269<sup>th</sup> CAB and the 308<sup>th</sup> CAB.

**\*Footnote:** On April 21, 1968 during Operation Delaware, Captain Floyd W. Olsen, Aircraft Commanders WO1 Robert C. Link, pilot, SP5 Frankie B. Johnson, Jr., crew chief, SP4 Larry C. Jamerson, door gunner, SSGT Lyle E. MacKendanz, and SP4 James E. Creamer, and passengers were aboard a UH-1H helicopter (tail # 66-16029) which was flying a combat mission. The aircraft remained with the Combat Assault aircraft during most of the operation until it was required to depart from Phu Bai, with rigging equipment for a recovery mission at LZ Veghel. During the flight, Captain Olsen acknowledged a radio transmission which stated the aircraft's secondary mission: the recovery operation at LZ Veghel had been canceled due to the tactical situation and the inclement weather conditions. Following acknowledgment of the canceled mission, the aircraft was lost. Search and Rescue forces failed to locate the missing aircraft and tried unsuccessfully to make radio contact. Ramp checks of all airfields and camps in the area were conducted; no further contact was made with Captain Olsen.

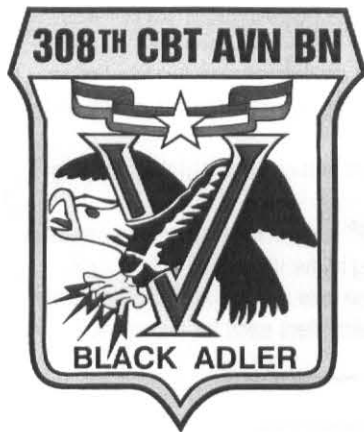
On May 25, 1968, U.S. forces located the tail boom of the missing aircraft in the grid coordinates YD 481033 approximately 30 kilometers southwest of Hue and five kilometers west of Route 547, Thua Thien Province. On May 27, 1968 ARVN units found SP 5 Johnson's identification tag in a truck approximately one kilometer south of the tail boom wreckage. Every aviator's worst fear was crashing in those triple canopy jungled mountains and being captured. The loss was felt not only by the 17<sup>th</sup>, but the entire 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion.

In July 1993, the incident was investigated by the JTF-FA. Two witnesses were interviewed and led the team to the site where the tail boom had originally been seen. Very little wreckage was remaining. In that area, during the war, the local population departed and those now present were not living in the area at the time of the incident. This incident is mentioned in Group 559 Vietnamese documents accurately noting the number of people in the UH-1H helicopter and that all 6 were dead. Also listed was the Vietnamese unit which shot down the helicopter, thus the follow-up is unilateral for the SRV to locate documents and/or witness related to the incident.

All of these American are still missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. LTC Olsen's sister is a League member.

Source: Operational Report, 308<sup>th</sup> CAB, After Action Report, 30 April 1968. Ann Mills Griffiths, Executive Director, National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia





## 308th COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION

ARRIVED VIETNAM: 20 DECEMBER 1967

DEPARTED VIETNAM: 1 JULY 1968

PREVIOUS STATION: FORT CAMPBELL

### SYMBOLISM

**Scroll and Star:** Colored in traditional red, white and blue, signifying the stars and stripes: symbol of the United States untiring and unyielding efforts to aid the Republic of Vietnam in its struggle against communist aggression.

**The V:** The large yellow V with the red strip, colors of the Republic of Vietnam, symbolizes Vietnam and its bid for victory. Additionally, the V represents the country in which the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion was activated and organized.

**The Eagle:** The traditional eagle of the United States symbolizes strength, agility, mobility, keen vision and swift violent striking power as indicated by the bolts of lightning. The 308th Combat Aviation Battalion was initially organized to support the "Screaming Eagles" of the 101st Airborne Division; thus, the eagle and the name "Black Adler."

The 308th Aviation Battalion (BLACK ADLER) was part of the 12th Aviation Group and was stationed at Bien Hoa before becoming attached to the 16th Aviation Group on 16 March 1968. From March - April 1968 it moved to I CTZ, and was in Camp Eagle by 12 April 1968. Under the operational control of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Mobile), its assets were utilized to assist in building the 159th Aviation Battalion and the 101st Aviation Battalion. The following companies served with the 308th Aviation Battalion in Vietnam:

**188th Assault Hel. Co.**



**17th Assault Hel. Co.**



**200th Assault Support Hel. Co.**



**272nd Assault Support Hel. Co.**



### **308<sup>TH</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion**

The mission of the 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion was to provide command, control, staff planning, administrative support, and pathfinder support for three to seven transport aircraft and/or helicopter companies.

The 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation battalion became operational on 10 February 1968 at Bien Hoa, RVN and consisted of the following units located as shown from 10 February to 8 March 1968.

The battalion began combat operations on 10 February 1968 with the 17<sup>th</sup>, 117<sup>th</sup>, 135<sup>th</sup>, and 195<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Companies in general support of III ARVN Corps, the Royal Australian Task Force, and U.S. Infantry Divisions operating in the III Corps Tactical zone. The companies were committed daily to tasks varying from combat support missions to reinforced battalion size combat assault operations. During this period, daily requirements for air craft were 10 lift, one command and control, and 4 armed helicopters each for two assault companies; and 8 lift and 10 armed helicopters for a special-mission company.

Unit	Location
Headquarters and Headquarters Company	Bien Hoa, RVN
17 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company	Long Binh, RVN
613 <sup>th</sup> TC DET	Long Binh, RVN
722 <sup>nd</sup> Signal DET	Long Binh, RVN
93 <sup>rd</sup> Med DET	Long Binh, RVN
117 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company	Bien Hoa, RVN
140 <sup>th</sup> TC DET	Bien Hoa, RVN
256 <sup>th</sup> Signal DET	Bien Hoa, RVN
135 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company	Black Horse, RVN
614 <sup>th</sup> TC DET	Black Horse, RVN
68 <sup>th</sup> Signal DET	Black Horse, RVN
87 <sup>th</sup> QM DET	Hoa Tam, RVN
195 <sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company	Long Binh, RVN
609 <sup>th</sup> TC DET	Long Binh, RVN
366 <sup>th</sup> Signal DET	Long Binh, RVN

After 8 March 1968 the 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion consisted of the following units and their strengths:

SUBORDINATE UNIT	OFFICER		WO		EM	
	AUTH	PDY	AUTH	PDY	AUTH	PDY
HHC	20	17	3	3	90	122
17 <sup>th</sup> AHC	15	17	52	41	152	154
613 <sup>th</sup> TC	1	1	1	1	70	75
722 <sup>nd</sup> Sig DET	0	0	1	1	8	10
188 <sup>th</sup> AHC	15	10	52	42	152	146
603 <sup>rd</sup> TC	1	1	0	0	70	65
154 <sup>th</sup> Med DET	1	1	0	0	8	7
4 <sup>th</sup> Sig DET	0	0	1	1	8	11
200 <sup>th</sup> ASHC	13	8	25	17	143	143
611 <sup>th</sup> TC	1	1	1	0	80	75

## The 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion

### **MOTTO-BLACK ADLER**

Initially the Battalion was at "cadre" strength and slowly became a Headquarters and Headquarters Company. I joined the Battalion, under the Command of LTC Onore E. Case in early February shortly after the TET Offensive. My staff included: S-1 Major Bill Roberts, S-2 Major Henry B. Parker, S-3 Major Don Prichard, S-4 Major Bernard M. McInerney, Headquarters and Headquarters Commandant Major Richard Adamski and Battalion Maintenance Officer Major Henderson. We became operational on 10 February 1968 and didn't know until a few days prior to that which companies we would have. We lacked the common equipment needed to talk to the other units, let alone pass on mission's, etc. We received very little help or support from the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group.

The four companies we received were the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC and 195<sup>th</sup> AHC stationed at Long Binh, the 117<sup>th</sup> AHC stationed at Bien Hoa and the 135<sup>th</sup> AHC stationed at Black Horse.

Control was a problem initially but things fell into place. On 27 February 1968, two enlisted men from the 117<sup>th</sup> were killed in a shootout with MP's in the village of Bien Hoa, mistaken identity on both sides. As a result LTC Case was relieved of duty and the 117<sup>th</sup> AHC which was originally slotted to go north with the 308<sup>th</sup> was dropped and replaced by the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC by order of Brigadier General Allen M. Burdette Jr., Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade, the 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC (214 CAB) out of Bear Cat was the other Company to move north and form the new 308<sup>th</sup>. Eighty one days after activation the Battalion deployed north to I Corps by air and sea. Headquarters and the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC were stationed at Camp Eagle, with the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC at LZ Sally and the 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC at Phu Bai. The Battalion gave little or no help to the movement of the companies except scheduling shipping (air and sea) and obtaining conex containers. Major McInerney worked day and night while I made the initial recon with the Company Commanders. Later our S-3 and finally I flew up with the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC.

Welcome to Camp Eagle, better known as the "dust bowl." The 308<sup>th</sup> Headquarters was given a piece of real estate on a small rise south of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Headquarters. It had a good all around view of the area, with the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC immediately north of us. Upon my arrival the staff and Headquarters Company were already setting up, having arrived two days earlier. LTC Charlie Steen, the new Battalion Commander, joined the staff upon their arrival. I met him once on our initial recon at Marble Mountain Air Field, DaNang. The Headquarters and Headquarters Company were operational almost immediately. I took over with Major Adamski, doing the supervision of the construction of bunkers, sand bagging of tents and work areas. We had no responsibility for the perimeter, but provided a contingency force in reserve. In my time at Battalion we were never called upon, even when the south west perimeter had been breached (minor penetration).

The 308<sup>th</sup> became operational on 12 April 1968, at which time LTC Steen established a first light weather check with his staff, to at least get our air craft in the air. I did most of my flying with Major Al Balberde (later CO of A Company 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion). LTC Steen flew with Major Prichard. We had very few controlled Battalion air operations. LTC Steen always flew them and I would fly with the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC, usually on Log missions.

Almost immediately the S-3 shop, with the help if the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Engineers, built an underground TOC (Tactical Operations Center). It took forever to complete but was cool and wet! We got mortared and rocketed a number of times. The time the south west perimeter was penetrated, we received a lot of RPG's. A group of us were sitting on top of one of our bunkers watching the show and could see them explode. The next morning we saw all the shrapnel fragments laying around us on the ground and so close....it wasn't a very smart idea!! There had been a lot of gripping from the Headquarters types, about having to fill sand bags and dig latrines etc. But after that attack the gripping stopped. Camp Eagle was regularly attacked, mortared and rocketed, LZ Sally not as often.

Probably the most annoying things were the heat and dust. The road immediately west of us, some 20 to 30 yards away, was well traveled and always full of dust. Adding to this discomfort were the Chinooks and Med Evac choppers flying directly across the road. I do not remember much rain during that period. The Headquarters mess was nothing. We had a tent with a floor, table and chairs. The Sea Hut's weren't constructed till October of 1968.

LTC Steen was an outstanding Commander and was very professional. He was a hard driver but very fair. In October 1968 LTC Steen was killed in an auto accident involving a driver going the wrong way on an off ramp in Washington D.C. The staff was excellent, especially Major McInerney and Major Prichard, they made my job very easy. SGM McCarty was a great soldier and example for the NCO's and Enlisted Men. He never brought me a problem without a solution.

One night, about two weeks after our arrival, the Division moved in some 40 mm dusters on half tracks about 100 yards to our east and we knew nothing about them....well they opened up for some test firing and quite a few people came unglued, thinking it was sappers. The one good thing about the 122 mm rockets was that they were either short or long. Our area was never hit, the mortars were close but I don't remember taking any casualties. From my view point as Battalion XO, I felt even though the Officers, Warrant Officers, NCO's and Enlisted Personnel of the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC had it rougher than the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC, they worked harder and tried even harder, which I thought was better.

Source: Colonel Hank Dreher (Retired), Black Adler 5

**"WELCOME TO EAGLE COUNTRY"**  
***IF YOU WANT IT DONE***  
***ASK THE 101ST***



# CAMP EAGLE

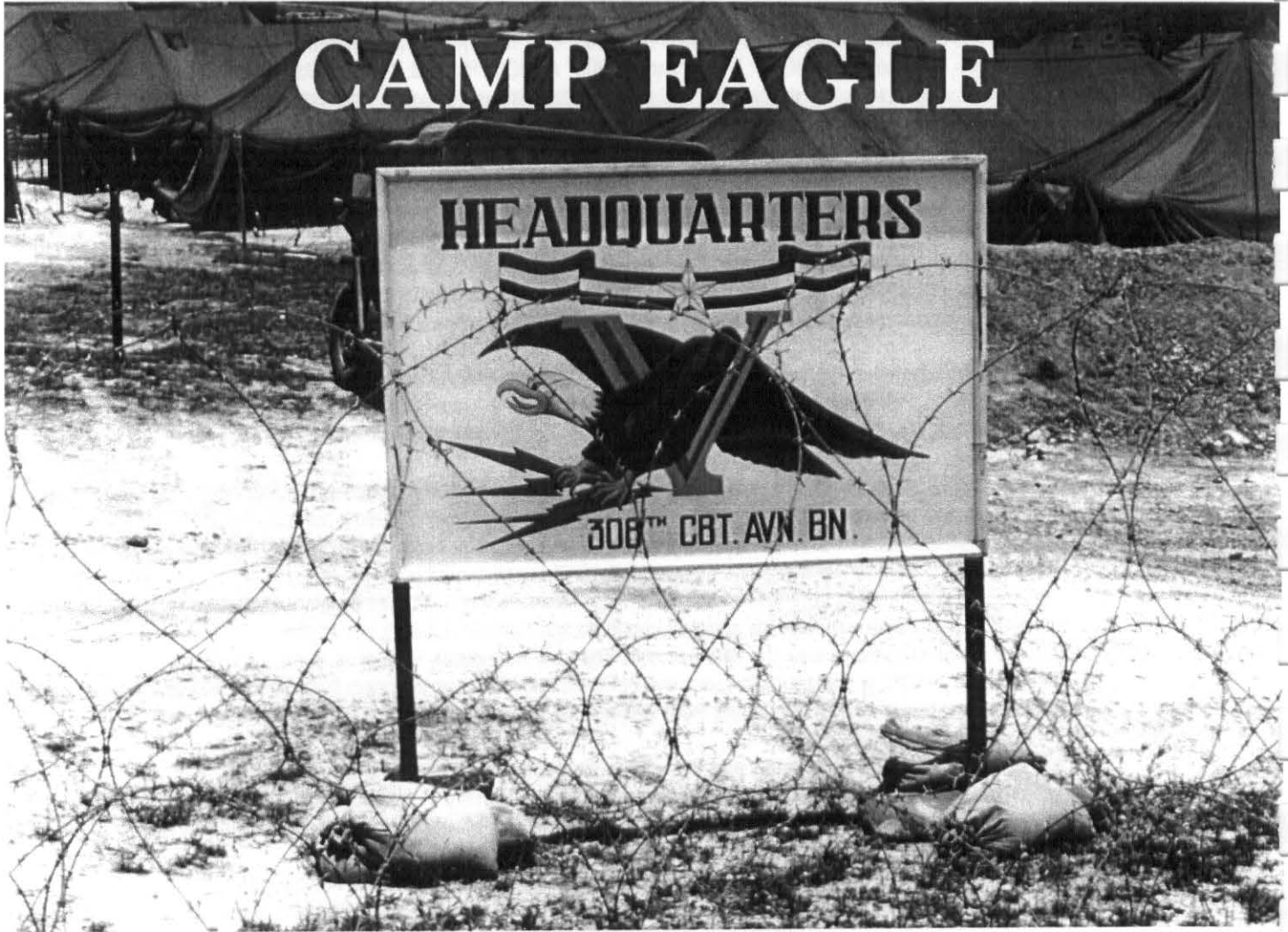


Photo by Colonel Hank Dreher - Black Adler 5, Black Widow 6



BLACK

ADLER

FLYER



Volume 1, Number 4

Tuesday, June 25, 1968

## 188th, 17th, Kill Six VC, Capture One

Wune 19-- While on a mission covering a Medivac in the mountains west of Camp Eagle Warrant Officer George Talley, New Orleans, La. noticed something out of place in the jungle below.

"It looked like a ladder going up into a tall tree," said WO Talley.

After the Medivac had been completed he returned to the area. The ladder was still in place as WO Talley flew over the area, but when his wingman followed it was gone.

As he made a strafing run over the area the concealed enemy opened fire with automatic weapons.

The "Lancer" team then opened up with rockets and miniguns, firing into the area until the enemy fire ceased.

Going down for a look WO Talley spotted a bunker that had taken a rocket hit. Laying nearby were five bodies in NVA uniforms.

HUE, June 22-- When a young enemy soldier attempted to elude capture in a nearby village today he was not counting on the "Kingsmen's" quick-acting CO.

Maj Daniel Addiss, Ft Myers, Fla, commanding officer of the 17th Aslt Hel Co, was flying the Command and Control ship on an operation lifting infantry into a village suspected of containing NVA.

Smoke rounds had been fired into the village in an attempt to drive out the enemy troops.

When one man tried to run across a field to another village the major brought his ship down and hovered in the path of the running man until he was exhausted and forced to surrender.

The young soldier was turned over to the infantry for questioning.

Maj Addiss has been CO of the 17th for about two weeks.

June 19-- While flying from their revetments to the main airstrip at LZ Sally for maintenance two "Spider gunships" of the 188th Aslt Hel Co, encountered a Vietnamese man in a heavily loaded sampan on the river.

The second ship, under the command of WO Joe Walker, Torrence, Cal., went down to investigate.

When the gunships approached the man in the boat was reportedly frightened, heading for shore. Diving from the sampan he swam to shore and attempted to run away.

WO Walker rolled in. The running Vietnamese began firing his AK-47 at the helicopter. SP4 Harry Kim, Vista, Cal., crew chief, and Sp4 Natividad Duran, Savinal, Tex., killed him with the door guns.

WO Walker then fired a rocket into the boat, causing a secondary explosion and destroying the craft.



Watch  
This  
Space

## 272nd Hauls Pontoon Bridge

Two CH-47 "Chinooks" from the 272nd Aslt Spt Hel Co lifted a pontoon bridge into a jungle site this week.

The aircraft, under the command of Maj Valentino Panzitta and Maj Harold Stansell, picked up the four pontoons and two bundles of aluminum planking at a Camp Eagle site, lifting them into a supposedly secure LZ.

The 272nd arrived only recently in Vietnam. The lift of the pontoon bridge was reportedly the first of its kind in the I Corps area.

## Major Johnson Is New 308th Battalion X.O.

Maj Jack O. Johnson, Des Moines, Iowa, recently assumed duties here as executive officer of the 308th Cbt Avn Bn.

Maj Johnson was commissioned a 2LT through the ROTC program at Iowa State University, in 1954. Later in the year he attended the 39 week Artillery Officer Basic Course at Ft. Sill, Okla.

He then underwent flight training, staying on at Ft. Rucker, Ala., after graduation as an instructor.

Maj Johnson was assigned to Vietnam in 1964, serving as an aircraft commander with the first armed helicopter company to arrive here.

He was wounded in action in Feb. '65 and subsequently evacuated to the U.S., spending 10 months in Fitzsimmons General Hospital, Denver.

Following his release from the hospital he was assigned to the

U. S. Army Aviation School at Ft. Rucker.

Maj Johnson has attended the Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kans.

Maj Johnson has been awarded the Purple Heart, the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device, the Air Medal, Air Medal with "V", the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm.

Prior to assuming his duties here Maj Johnson served as company commander of the 188th Aslt Hel Co at LZ Sally.



Beginning next week R&R will be featured in a weekly column of news collected especially for the benefit of men ready to go.

You'll learn what to do to apply, requirements for certain spots and things of general interest about R&R.

The "BLACK ADLER FLYER" is an authorized weekly newspaper published by the Public Information Office of the 308th Cbt Avn Bn, APO SF 96383. Views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army.

Commanding Officer.....LTC Charles S. Steen, Jr.  
Information Officer.....2LT Charles R. Boulay  
Editor.....Sp4 Jack T. McDaniel

# CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT



## HEADQUARTERS

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT  
THE  
COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE 308TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION  
HAS AWARDED THIS CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

TO

SP5 GREGORY P. ALLEN RA 54 371 364

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE DURING THE PERIOD 16 MARCH 1968 TO 28 JUNE 1968

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

THIS

30TH

DAY OF

JUNE

19 68

  
COMMANDING

## **The Move North -- Advance Party**

Maj Henderson, the senior member of the advance party, departed 16<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group 9 March 1968 and coordinated with LTC Steen, the new 308<sup>th</sup> Battalion Commanding Officer. On 10 March, the advance party proceeded to Gia Le Naval Construction Battalion Camp and located the assigned base area. CPT Olsen and two NCO's were assigned to plan base development for the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC. Sgt Riggins was assigned to plan and layout the Battalion Headquarters site. Coordination was effected with CPT Dickey, FSE, 1<sup>st</sup> Bde, 101<sup>st</sup> Division was contacted for transportation requirements to move unit cargo, conex and palletized loads to Eagle site for 308<sup>th</sup> CAB and to LZ Sally for 188<sup>th</sup> AHC. Initially, sufficient transportation, 5 ton S&P tractor-trailers, were available for movement of cargo from Hue-Phu Bai; however, the vehicles were controlled by the local Fleet Logistical Command (FLC) on daily dispatch by that support organization and later mission requirements of higher priority curtailed availability. Two days effective use of the 10 plus S&P's was completed. The third and fourth day only 2 ½ ton capacity, were utilized to the fullest for continuous movement. Support from FLC was marginal due to commitment in the local area. The fifth day of the cargo movement from Phu Bai, assistance was gained from the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC and the 131<sup>st</sup> SAC with 5 ton trailers. This assisted in completing the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC Movement to LZ Sally and the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC and the 308<sup>th</sup> HHC to Eagle site. However, through extensive use of unit vehicles, 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC moved its cargo rapidly by unit transportation to its site at Phu-Bai Airfield. The main problem encountered was the lack of on site unloading capability. One forklift at Eagle for use by the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC and 308<sup>th</sup> HHC, and one at LZ Sally for the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC presented a major unloading problem that caused delay in turn around time for the trucks making the cargo runs. Quite often this resulted in only two trips per day. By the close of the sixth day, the majority of cargo for all units was on site or en route.

Source: After action report 308<sup>th</sup> CAB Operational Report 30 April 1968

## **The Step Child**

Upon arrival from Fort Campbell, Kentucky on 20 December 1967 the 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion (CAB), was activated and assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group (CAG), 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade at Bien Hoa with Headquarters located at the HONOUR-SMITH compound. When ordered north to I Corps with units at Camp Eagle, LZ Sally and Phu Bai, we were still assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG but were attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> CAG at Marble Mountain Air Field, Da Nang and placed under Operational Control of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division's Screaming Eagles.

### **The Problems:**

Administration- The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division wanted no part of it, but naturally asked for numerous reports. The 12<sup>th</sup> CAG ignored us and the 16<sup>th</sup> CAG reluctantly supported us. As the XO I never heard from the 12<sup>th</sup> CAG after we left Bien Hoa. Unless we called or flew to Da Nang the 16<sup>th</sup> CAG never contacted us or came to see us. Our Battalion Commander, LTC Steen was their S-3 prior to the 308<sup>th</sup> Command.

Aircraft and Aircraft related maintenance- Anything that could not be accomplished by the companies and/or our detachments had to be done at Red Beach in Da Nang. That was also true for the 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion.

Vehicular and other ground equipment- This was the biggest Bug-A-Boo, everything was sent north to Camp Evans where Task Force Lane (an Army Reserve Unit), attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Air Mobile), was located. I know the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC came up short on a lot of small generators and we were LOW on the priority list.

Source: Colonel Hank Dreher (Retired), Black Adler 5

## **308<sup>th</sup> Headquarters and Headquarters Company**

The unit began to pack and crate immediately after receiving a verbal movement order.

The major problem encountered was a lack of time in which to pack and move property. The unit packed in three days. In addition the initial plans were based on sea move. On 11 March 1968 the unit was informed it would move by air. A readjustment in planning was made and unit's first C-130 sorties departed 15 March 1968.

In addition to the lack of adequate time, the unit encountered a problem in obtaining proper banding and crating material. The unit was able to borrow limited amounts of padding and wrapping paper from various units in Bien Hoa area, however, this did not meet the needs of the unit.

The following C-130 sorties were flown:

- a. 15 March 1968 - 3
- b. 16 March 1968 - 11
- c. 17 March 1968 - 6

The S-1 Section of the 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion was notified on 9 March 1968 that the battalion would be transferred to the I Corps area. Upon receipt of this information, the S-1 Section took action to organize materials, office equipment, files, and personnel for the deployment. Records and files pertaining to the 117<sup>th</sup>, 195<sup>th</sup>, and 135<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Companies were transferred to their new battalions. All S-1 files, records, publications, furniture, etc., were organized into essential and non-essential items. All essential items that were necessary for the operation of the S-1 section at Cong Ly Street were organized, but not packed in order to keep the section operational until movement was accomplished. All non-essential items were packed by the S-1 personnel in two of the three conex containers allocated to the section. The third conex container was packed just prior to departure with essential items for the operation of the S-1 section. The 1/4 ton truck assigned to the S-1 section was also prepared for movement. All equipment organic to the S-1 section was accompanied by at least one member of the section. Specialists Lord, Aiken and Hansen accompanied the Conex containers to Hue-Phu Bai where the containers were unloaded and their custody given to other members of this organization. The S-1 vehicle, driven by 1LT

Smith, had as passengers MAJ Roberts, 2LT Boulay, and SP5 Bazan. Movement from Cong Ly Street began at approximately 2300 hours 14 March 1968 with movement of the conex containers. The S-1 vehicle left Cong Ly Street at approximately 0200 hours 15 March 1968. When the S-1 vehicle arrived at the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port the S-1 conex containers had already boarded the C-130 for movement. There was approximately a 24 hour delay before the remainder of the S-1 personnel departed Bien Hoa Airbase. The S-1 1/4 ton truck, separated from its trailer, departed at approximately 2200 hours with MAJ Roberts, 1LT Smith and SP5 Bazan. 2LT Boulay followed with the trailer. All personnel had arrived at Hue by early morning 16 March 1968. Personnel proceeded to Camp Eagle approximately 0700 hours 17 March 1968. Upon arrival, all sections worked together to erect tents, install latrines and showers and dig fox holes. The S-1 section equipment was unpacked on 20 March and the section was partially operational the following day.

Upon notification of the movement order, the S-4 Section made necessary coordination to obtain the required number of conex containers for shipment of supplies and materials. A total of 53 conex containers were obtained and distributed to staff sections and other elements of Headquarters and Headquarters Company. Each section was responsible for maintaining an informal inventory list of items placed in their conex containers.

The conex containers were marked with the Unit Identification Code and owning section. The next step was to segregate the essential items from the normal operating items to insure early arrival at the destination of the essential items.

The next action was to prepare Transportation Movement Control Documents and coordinate with the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron at Bien Hoa. The 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron representative determined all section equipment was air transportable.

The movement of conex containers, personnel, and vehicles to the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port at Bien Hoa began approximately 2000 hours, 14 March 1968. Five tractor trucks with stake and platform trailers began shuttling conex containers to the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port on 15 March 1968. WO Skelton, from the S-4 Section, was located at the 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port to assist in loading and to insure all items of the shipment were loaded and transported to their destination. The first C-130 sortie departed at 0230 hours on 15 March 1968. A total of three sorties departed Bien Hoa on 15 March 1968. In addition to conex containers, some vehicles and personnel were moved on each sortie when space was available as determined by the load master of each C-130. The essential items were shipped on these first sorties. No other sorties were begun until approximately 2000 hours on 15 March 1968. A total of eleven (11) sorties were completed by 0400 hours on 16 March 1968. Once again, operations were at a standstill until approximately 1930 hours on 16 March. At this time the six remaining sorties were dispatched. The 20<sup>th</sup> and final sortie departed Bien Hoa at 0200 hours, 17 March 1968. At this time all conex containers, pallet loads, organic vehicles, and personnel had departed with the exception of 1 3/4 ton and trailer which remained with the rear party.

### **17<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company**

The 17<sup>th</sup> AHC was alerted to move on 7 March 1968 with no firm dates established nor definite guidance finished on specific locations. On 9 March a liaison party from the 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, including the commanding officer of the 17<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company, departed from Bien Hoa for Hue Phu Bai. On the same date an advanced party from this unit, consisting of representatives from the unit and detachments and a 1/4 ton vehicle with radio, departed for Da Nang. On 12 March 1968 the unit was informed that the first C-130 sorties would depart on 16 March and a sea shipment would depart on 20 March. At this time preparations to pack for the ultimate move and to segregate released from flying operational missions and relieved of the commitment for perimeter security. On 17 March the first C-130 sorties departed, and on 19 March the last C-130 sorties were completed. The first flight of UH-1's departed on 18 March and arrived at Camp Eagle on 19 March. The second and final flight of UH-1's departed on 19 March and arrived at Camp Eagle on 20 March.

### **200<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company**

The 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC began to move to Camp Eagle at 0600 hours on 19 March 1968 by air and by sea. The air movement party moved from Bear Cat to Bien Hoa by unit vehicular transportation on 19 March 1968 for further air movement by C-130 to Hue Phu Bai. Unit organic vehicles moved by road convoy and closed at the Aerial Port at 1735 hours 19 March 1968. A total of 28 C-130 sorties were required to move 500,000 lbs of unit cargo. There were two C-130 sorties on 19 March and 26 C-130 sorties on 20 March 1968. The first sortie departed POE at 2315, 20 March 1968. The sea lift party departed Bear Cat on 20 March 1968 and arrived POE on 21 March 1968. Total weight to be sea lifted was estimated at 400 short tons. The rear maintenance detachment arrived at Phu Bai by CH-47 on 20 March 1968. Due to the relative few problems encountered by movement personnel of the 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC during the unit move, no recommendations are submitted.

Upon reorganization and relocation to Northern I Corps in mid March, the battalion was attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group and placed under the operational control of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Retaining the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC, the battalion received the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC and the 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC, giving the battalion a composition of two assault companies (UH-1 aircraft) and one Assault Support Company (CH-47). Aircraft requirements in support of the 101<sup>st</sup> Abn Div have been 6 cargo helicopters, 20 lift, 2 command and control, and 8 armed helicopters daily. Support rendered the division included company size assaults, combat resupply, command and control, pacification and psy-ops, chemical dispersion, long range patrolling, security reaction force, armed convoy escort, reconnaissance, and close air support, in addition to aircraft recovery and parts transport for the division's organic aviation. During the period 19-21 April 1968, the battalion was the principal Army aviation support to the division in Operation DELAWARE, which established a new fire support base to provide artillery fire on infiltration routes within the A Shau Valley. Aviation support included company size airmobile assaults, lifting a total of 1180 troops during the initial phase of the operation. The battalion also provided general support for the division with a minimum of one assault helicopter company and 6 CH-47 helicopters per day throughout the operation.

The first assigned mission was flown for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division by the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company 18 March 1968. The

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, became operational on 31 March 1968. The 17<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company became fully operational on 12 April 1968, the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company on 4 April 1968, and the 200<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company on 10 April 1968.

Shortage of the two authorized UH-1D helicopters negated the command and control capability of this headquarters during battalion air assaults. Subordinate units were tasked to provide command and control aircraft until this unit received one UH-1D helicopter.

### **Aircraft Maintenance**

Units encountered dusty terrain conditions upon the initial deployment into their respective areas of operation. The initial shortage of soil stabilization (peneprime) was eventually overcome; however, for one month engine and related rotating controls and control surfaces received abrasive wear. A highly effective FOD program was developed and is being monitored to lessen damage. Peneprime is continuing to be placed on helipads and revetment areas as it comes available.

Light discipline has an effect on the amount of night maintenance that can be accomplished in the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company Area. The major maintenance effort was accomplished during daylight hours; however, aircraft availability has been marginally acceptable. As the local enemy situation improves, night maintenance will be increased.

Initially, the direct support company providing maintenance and repair parts support for units of this battalion was located one and one half flying hours distance. To overcome the number of flying hours that would have been expended on maintenance and parts runs, a consolidated run was scheduled to service all three units three times a week utilizing a CH-47 of the 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC. This method of resupply was effective. At the end of this reporting period, another direct support company, at a closer location, has received the support mission for the battalion aircraft. This reduction in distance should substantially improve the support.

Source: Operational Report, 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, After Action Report, 30 April 1968.

### **Excerpts From The 308<sup>th</sup> CAB Daily Staff Journal For February 1968**

At 2150 hours on 26 February 1968 small arms fire was heard coming from the vicinity of Highway 1.

At 2200 hours 3/4 ton trucks with 11 personnel from the 117<sup>th</sup> AHC's Sidewinders gun platoon, departed HONOUR-SMITH Compound.

At 2230 hours a bus with Vietnamese employees reported that they were being fired on by a 3/4 ton truck on Highway 1, vicinity rail road track, Bien Hoa.

At 2245 hours received a call from the 117<sup>th</sup> that a 3/4 ton truck had been ambushed in Bien Hoa, 2 KIA (SP/5 Robert E. Hedge and SP/5 Gerald W. McCaffrey) and 3 WIA (SP/5 Aaron E. Newton and SP/4 David J. Knight).

At 2300 hours report received 1 WIA (SP/5 William C. Elder) as a result from encounter with guards at Bien Hoa gate.

At 2330 hours received report from MP's that 3/4 ton truck with 2 KIA's are still in the truck with hot wires laying on the vehicle.

At 2345 hours Major Adamski formed reaction force, w/MP escort.

At 0030 hours word from the 117<sup>th</sup> that 2 KIA's were confirmed, WIA unknown at this time. Air Police were attempting to get power cut off.

### **Sidewinder Ambush In Bien Hoa**

The following list of men were in the 3/4 ton truck the night of February 26, 1968. SP/5 Robert B. Hedge, SP/4 Gerald W. McCaffrey, SP/4 David J. Knight, JR., SP/5 William C. Elder, SP/5 Aaron E. Newton. I can remember that there was a AK-47 which Newton was carrying, an M-79, that I believe Mac was carrying, and I had my M-60 from my helicopter. I do not remember what Hedge or my gunner were carrying. The location of the 3/4 ton was as follows: Driver, Knight; Shotgun, Elder; R/H side behind me was McCaffrey; Hedge was on the L/H rear jump seat; and I am not sure of Newton's position. I was at my ship as usual, completing an after flight, when the 3/4 ton pulled up and I was asked to ride along, which I did. We departed the flight line area and headed for down town Bien Hoa, with the purpose of taking the six officers to a safe house. We went out the gate passing an ARVN Compound near a water tower ( the same one we returned to after the ambush), made a right turn and headed toward the city and the compound. The trip there was uneventful. We entered the compound and turned around and headed back the way we came. We had just made a right turn when suddenly I saw some flashes from a building high up off to our front. At the same time I heard a voice say, "Were Taking Fire". Then I heard the distinct sound of an M-79 grenade launcher, the flash of an explosion up and to the right, (the same location of the first flashes?), at the same time I heard the report of small arms fire! , and someone said "I'm Hit." There was an explosion on the right side of the truck, suddenly one side of my head burned. I can remember looking over at Knight. Everything seemed like it was in slow motion. We were both wounded by shrapnel. I was trying to charge my M-60, but it would not charge, (after all this was over the MP's returned it to me and there was a hole in the operating rod tube. No wonder I could not get it to load a round!) This all happened in a split second. When I looked at Knight, his chin was hanging down below his lower lip. The explosion blew the truck off the road and into a power pole located next to a building. The right hand door would not open, so I climbed up and over the cab. As I was standing on the edge of the truck I could not get my M-60 out of the cab because it was hung up on something. I was standing there for a moment in time looking at what was left of Mac's head! What I saw, was his head bubbling and laying right behind where my head had been. Some how we all got clear of the truck and I recall checking the bodies, Hedge was sitting down and slumped over, facing the rear of the 3/4 ton, we knew they were KIA. There was still activity to our rear, at this time, someone said we had to get out of there so we (Knight, Newton and Elder) made our way back toward the gate we had left from. We were yelling at the guard that we were Americans so he would not shoot. We entered the gate and I remember sitting down with Knight, we just looked at each other wondering what had just went down? SP/5 Newton was trying to get back out the gate, which he did for a few



moments (some where in this I remember seeing an American GI coming up the street, near the truck), he went back toward the ditch, where he (still had the AK-47/ with a 30 rd mag) went to a prone position, then got up and came back to where we were, indicating that he did not have any more ammo. When SP/5 Newton used his AK-47 during the initial fire fight, it may have caused problems. I remember medics and MP's asking questions about what happened. Some time later they called me in and put my M-60 on a table. That was when I saw it was unoperational.

I think Mac and a guy named Camp had an enlistment pact; if either one was killed the other one would escort the body home. I recall that they enlisted together. These (and all the lives that where lost) guys died for "Naught", and on the ground, out of their element, which was the "Air"! Hedge had a lot of time "In-country" and was close to rotating home! I will give you a personal observation of what went down. I believe that good ole Charlie (everyone said that the "VC" ruled the night) waited until the right time and they fired at the F--king ARVNS as far as I was and am concerned were chickenshit any way. In some ways I still hold myself to blame because I could not defend my position as "shotgun".

Major William H. Roberts, the Battalion S-1 recalls that the troops mentioned were returning to their home base (after a celebration) when a shot was fired - this shot came from an unknown source (or it was suspected that one of the troops in the 3/4 ton fired the round). The vehicle was passing a South Vietnamese guard post and when the shot was fired they thought they were under attack and returned fire on the 3/4 ton. It was the SV ordinance that killed them. Major Roberts was not privy to the investigation that followed, but did receive the initial report and to the best of his knowledge this was reported to him and our Bn CO.

Source: Crew Chief Bill Elder, Sidewinder 663

### **Why the 188<sup>th</sup> Moved North**

Because of the Sidewinder Ambush, the 117<sup>th</sup> AHC commander and XO were relieved of duty and sent to other units. The 117<sup>th</sup> was dropped from the 308<sup>th</sup> PCS move to Camp Eagle and replaced by the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC. The rest is aviation history as the 308<sup>th</sup> was a major player in the transition of the 101<sup>st</sup> ABD from parachutes to helicopters. The 188<sup>th</sup> AHC played a big part in the Screaming Eagles "Rendezvous With Destiny" in Northern I Corps during March through June 1968.

Source: Jack Johnson, BW 6, Jun 67-Dec 68

### **Permanent Change of Station -- 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company**

On 7 March 1968, the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company was notified of a movement of the complete company with all TO&E equipment.

The advanced party, consisting of the Supply Officer, Service Platoon Leader, and representative of the Operations section, left Dau Tieng on 9 March 1968 for the new location, Landing Zone Sally. The necessary equipment for the advance party, which included tents, poles, a jeep, trailer, rations, and other necessary items, was shipped forward by CH-47 on 10 March 1968.

11 March 1968 marked the start of packing. All sections of the company began to load their organic equipment into conex containers. The three flight platoons were in the best position to be loaded first while areas such as the mess hall and the 603<sup>rd</sup> Maintenance Detachment had to maintain operation in order to insure feeding of the troops and maintenance of the aircraft.

The next two days, 12 and 13 March 1968, were devoted to packing and loading. The mess hall ceased operation after the evening meal and likewise night maintenance was terminated. By dark on the night of 13 March approximately 40% of the company was entirely packed. This 40% was composed mainly of the equipment in the flight platoons, operations, orderly room, and officer, NCO Clubs' stock. The 188<sup>th</sup> completed its last III Corps Mission at Noon on 13 March 1968.

The first sortie of the combined air and sea move appeared in the form of a C-130 at the Dau Tieng airstrip on 14 March 1968 at 1000 hours. With the aid of an Air Force loading team, conex's and pallets were shuttled from the company area to the loading ramp. It was at this point that the first major drawback was encountered, a lack of forklifts. Much time was spent coordinating the use of the three forklifts available to us. An additional setback was the fact that the Air Force would not work after dark. This situation was magnified when the forklift, organic to the company, was dead lined.

The first flight of helicopters left Dau Tieng at 1300 hours on 14 March. It included five UH-1H and two UH-1C helicopters plus crew equipment and rations for five days. It should be noted that the gunships were disarmed so that they carried only about 25% of their ordinance. The 25% was retained to provide a temporary cover for downed aircraft from the flight.

On 15 March, more C-130's arrived and subsequently, the day was spent loading these aircraft. An individual from the company went along on each C-130 to secure the cargo in the event that the aircraft was diverted and unloaded at an en route destination.

A new method was devised for shuttling loaded conex containers and pallets to the airfield. It was found that three pallets or conex containers could be placed on one five tone tractor-trailer. By using five of these vehicles a steady loading of C-130's was assured.

Also on this day, the second flight of five slicks and two guns left Dau Tieng. The Company Commander left with the second flight as more than 50% of the equipment was loaded on the Air Force transports.

The majority of the company was packed and ready to be loaded on 15 March. Tents were removed and general police of the area began. The Maintenance Detachment was still palletizing its equipment, but by nightfall most of this had been accomplished. In addition, the sea move was prepared in order to meet the convoy date of 16 March. Items included in the sea move were signal vans, and various other items not transportable by air.

At 0700 hours on 16 March, the sea move convoy left Dau Tieng for the terminal at New Port. After the convoy left Dau Tieng, the only personnel remaining were those ferrying the remainder of the flyable aircraft and rear party. On this day, 80% of the equipment had

been loaded, the company area was in a high state of police, and everything was running smoothly.

In excess of 90% of the equipment was moved when the Executive Officer left with the seven flyable slicks and three gunships at 1300 hours on 17 March 1968. With the departure of the third flight, approximately 12 personnel remained behind to crew the aircraft that were still down.

After an intermediate stop at Dong Ba Thin, the third flight landed at Landing Zone Sally at 1200 hours, 18 March 1968. At the destination, convoys began moving equipment from Hue-Phu Bai to LZ Sally. The first convoy began on 14 March and moved all the air shipments to LZ Sally by 20 March. The convoy from the sea move arrived at LZ Sally on 29 March 1968.

Source: Operational Report of Headquarters, 16th Combat Aviation Group for Period Ending 30 April and for the period ending 31 July 1968.

### **Development of 188th AHC Base Camp - LZ Sally**

LZ Sally was set up in the Huong Tra District of Thua Thien Province. The Province was 450 miles north of Dau Tieng and dominated by sand dunes, coastal plains, and rugged mountainous terrain. It would take some time to learn what tactics were needed to fly in this new area of operation. The major operational target areas during our time at LZ Sally was the elimination of enemy forces in the (1) Con Thien - Gio Linh area north of Dong Ha; the opening of Route 9 with the subsequent relief of Khe Sahn Combat Base; and an assault into the A Shau Valley. The 188th would play a major role in the A Shau Valley campaign.

Five slicks and a Spider Light Fire Team, commanded by Black Widow 4, Lt. Frank Linster, made up the first flight of aircraft to arrive at LZ Sally. On arrival, Lt. Linster reported to the Commander of the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division Task Force, Col. John Cushman at the Tactical Operations Center (TOC). As he pointed towards a Vietnamese Cemetery, outside the existing perimeter, Col. Cushman advised Lt. Linster to use as much room as he wanted for the 188th Company area. The small group of twenty-four men set up a hasty perimeter using concertina wire and trip flares. The perimeter was moved further out once the entire company and detachments arrived. For physical security, the 188th would man nine fighting positions each night, with three men per bunker. Setting up shop during the dry season meant dealing with and eating a lot of dust. LZ Sally was a tent city and our GP medium tents fit right in. Permanent Sea Huts weren't constructed until October 1968, during the C/101 time frame.

Besides the small individual bunkers being constructed next to each person's immediate living quarters, two major bunkers were constructed in the midst of the company area. One for the soldiers and the other for our 154th Medical Detachment. The 154th Medical Detachment's bunker was completely below ground. Steel railroad rails and ties were scrounged from the Saigon - Hanoi railroad line which traversed through the base camp. An underground Tactical Operations Center was built. The 603rd set up shop next to the new "WEB" airstrip. Revelments were constructed along the airstrip and in a crescent shaped configuration just outside the company area. Once again, the 188th would be stationed in a remote area where living conditions would be very basic, at best.

Our new cast of players would include the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Cavalry Division, the 3rd Brigade 82nd Airborne Division, the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions, the 1st ARVN Division, MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Studies and Observation Group) better known as CCN (Command and Control North) and our old friends, the 5th Special Forces Group. Our primary focus would be the direct support for 101st Airborne Divisions's 2nd Brigade, which consisted of the 1/501, 2/501 and the 1/502 Infantry based at LZ Sally. The 188th was directly involved in supporting Operations, Carentan I and II, Delaware, Nevada Eagle, and the cross border SOG missions, code named Prairie Fire.

As the last of the 188th helicopters closed on LZ Sally, Hanoi Hana came up on our radio frequency and "Welcomed the 188th Assault Helicopter Company Black Widows to LZ Sally." She informed us, in so many words, that we would not be a factor in the struggle between the communist forces and the puppet government of South Vietnam.

(1) Vietnam Studies, The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-68, Department of the Army

### **Comments on the Relationship with the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne**

On March 1, 1968, the 2nd Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division, began to occupy LZ Sally, 11 kilometers WNW of Hue City. The brigade task force, elements of which had been fighting between Hue and Quang Tri since its arrival just before Tet '68 broke on 31 January, was together again for the first time since it left Cu Chi.

One of the first units to join us at LZ Sally was the 188th Assault Helicopter Company with its slicks and gunships. That was the beginning of a remarkable team effort.

The lowland plains north and west of Hue were infested with North Vietnamese Army formations. These NVA units had infiltrated into South Vietnam from the north. In January, they had occupied the villages. In the Tet offensive they had entered the city of Hue. After having been driven out of Hue, they were now moving about the countryside. The roads were insecure, the district towns were beleaguered, and many villages and hamlets were under VC and NVA control. Four months later, by the end of June 1968, the NVA was gone and the process of digging out the last of the remaining VC units was under way.

LZ Sally was on rising ground with good drainage and firm soil. Around a short laterite airstrip there was ample room with open fields of fire beyond, and we had an access road to QL 1. No point in our AO was more than 10 miles distant, thus no more than a few minutes away by helicopter. On the hard laterite surface of the old airstrip we could operate a brigade supply point. We had a brigade clearing station into which "dust-off" helicopters could take the wounded men of the brigade for treatment and further evacuation if necessary.

The 2nd Brigade Task Force won by applying three basic principles: Work closely with the Vietnamese. Scour the area with its companies putting constant and unrelenting pressure on the enemy day and night. And at every opportunity quickly encircle him so tightly that he could not wriggle out of the trap — this was the "cordon operation" in which choppers brought in troops to encircle the enemy in

daylight and then illumination from flare ships and artillery lit up the area so that he could not escape.

The battle of Phuoc Yen was a classic example of the tactic. About noon April 28, the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division's Black Panther Company, under the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 501<sup>st</sup> Infantry, at the village of Phuoc Yen in a bend shaped like a stocking in the Song Bo River six kilometers from LZ Sally, made contact with what was estimated to be a battalion sized force.

The 188<sup>th</sup> AHC immediately joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade in establishing a cordon, inserting A/1-502 into an LZ to the east of the Black Panther Company to establish a blocking position. A/1-501 moved overland to a blocking position on the river bank to the west. B/2-501 conducted a combat assault and occupied a blocking position on the river bank to the southeast of the village. Three Popular Force platoons plus 25 militia of a nearby hamlet established blocking positions on the river to the east. A/1-502 drove to the river's edge to the north of the village. By dark all units had joined their flanks and the cordon was established.

During the night of 28 April, constant illumination was provided by CH-47 and UH-1 flareships. 105mm, 155mm, and 8" howitzer rounds impacted within the cordon. During the early morning hours of 29 April the enemy tried three times to rupture the left flank of A/1-502. These attempts were repulsed with a heavy volume of fire and courageous determination by the men of A Company. During the day of April 29, the brigade reinforced and tightened its encirclement, which was sealed throughout the night of 29 April under continuous illumination. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, B/1-501 conducted a combat assault to an LZ in the northern sector of the cordon and replaced the Black Panther Company.

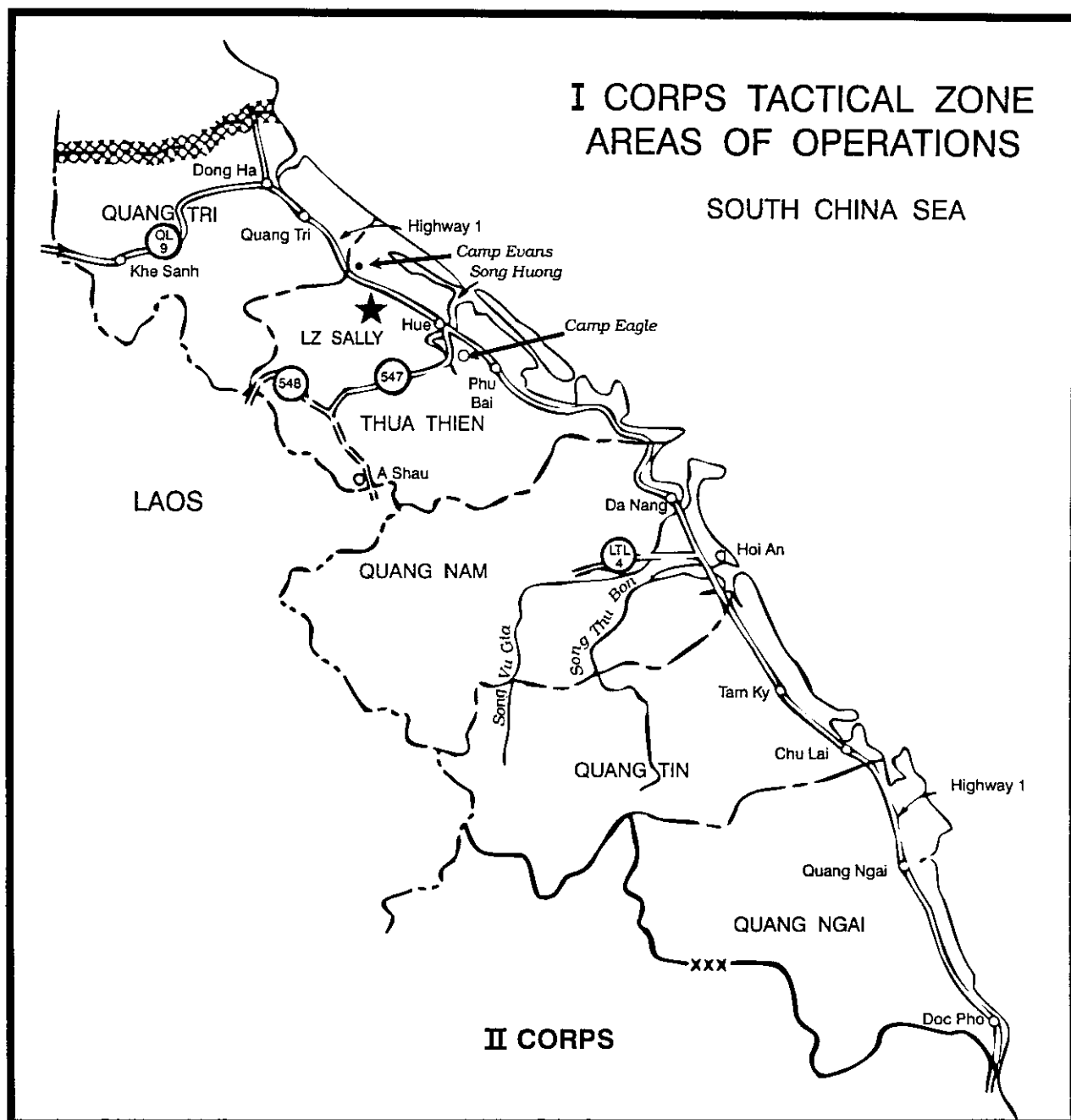
In the early hours of 1 May, during a short break in the illumination caused by the time lapse between the expended flareship going off station and artillery illumination being placed over the cordon, the enemy made an all-out effort to penetrate the area occupied by A/1-502. This attack was repulsed by intense fire. At 0800 hours, a psychological warfare team began broadcasting appeals to surrender which resulted in 16 NVA surrendering. Afterwards, TAC air and artillery fires were resumed and during the afternoon friendly elements shifted their positions in order to tighten the cordon. B/2-501 relieved A/1-502 in place, and A/1-502 was extracted to LZ Sally. The cordon remained in place throughout the night of 1 May and all of 2 May. Early 3 May, the enemy made another futile attempt to break out of the cordon. A 55 gallon drum CS drop was made over the village from a CH-47 after which further appeals were made by loudspeaker for the enemy to surrender. Companies B/1-501 and A/2-501 made the final sweep of the village overcoming small pockets of resistance and completed the cordon operation.

We had lost 8 US and 2 ARVN killed, 44 US and 12 ARVN wounded. The enemy had lost 429 killed, 107 prisoners (the highest prisoner count ever in a Vietnam action), and 117 weapons captures. Also captured were the radios and signal operating instructions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 90<sup>th</sup> NVA Regiment, which was totally eliminated. The Second Brigade and the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company had executed a classic.

**Source:** Lieutenant General John H. Cushman, U.S. Army, Retired, Commanding Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division



LZ SALLY APRIL 1968



## **STATIONS**

LZ SALLY

COORDINATES: YD642274

HUONG TRA DISTRICT, Population 57,545

THUA THIEN PROVINCE (Home of the A Shau Valley) Population 172,119

10 MARCH 1968 - 1 JULY 1968

AREA OF OPERATION, NORTHERN I CORPS / LAOTIAN BORDER





Photo by: CW2 Curt Knapp, Aviation Section, HHC, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) November 1968

*Home of the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division "Screaming Eagles" (referred to as the Puking Buzzards) from March 1968 through March 1970 when it was handed over to the 1st ARVN Division. LZ Sally was named after the wife of a 1st Cavalry Company Commander. During the 188th's time at LZ Sally it was a tent city and a much smaller base camp. (Source LTG John H. Cushman, Commander, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division)*

### Points of Interest

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| A. Southeast Main Gate  | 9. 2nd Brigade Headquarters, TOC and VIP Pad      |
| B. North Gate: Backdoor   | 10. Hdqts and Hdqts Company                       |
| C. PK17- 1st ARVN Division Compound                                   | 11. 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry "First Strike"  |
| D. Highway 1  | 12. 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry "First Strike"  |
| E. Song Bo River  | 13. 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry "Geronimo"      |
| F. An Loi Bridge  | 14. 1st Battalion, 321st Artillery                |
| G. Saigon to Hanoi Railroad   | 15. C Company, 326th Engineer Battalion           |
| 1. 188th, 603rd, 154th Medical Detachment and 4th Signal Company Area | 16. 47th Scout Dog Platoon                        |
| 2. 603rd Maintenance Area   | 17. B Company, 326th Medical Detachment           |
| 3. 188th Motor Pool   | 18. 2nd Platoon, Company A, 801st Maintenance BN. |
| 4. Helicopter Revetments  | 19. 501st Supply Company                          |
| 5. US Navy MCB4 SEABEE's  | 20. 265th Radio Research Company                  |
| 6. C Battery 2/11 Artillery (155mm)                                   | 21. 34th Public Information Detachment            |
| 7. Dirt Pit, Dump and Small arms target range                         | 22. 7th Airforce Detachment                       |
| 8. 101st Military Police Detachment                                   | 23. Access Road                                   |
|   | 24. POL   |
|   | 25. Brigade Aviation Section                      |

LISTEN UP: (Available upon request, Black Widow guided tours to the following locations)

DANANG - 65 MILES SOUTH  
KHE SAHN - 36 MILES NORTHWEST

DMZ - 32 MILES NORTH  
A SHAU VALLEY - 23 MILES WEST

## 2ND BDE 101ST AIR CAV DIV



Curt Knapp Collection

COL JOHN A. HOEFLING 2ND BDE COMMANDER AFTER COL JOHN CUSHMAN, VIP PAD LZ SALLY - 1968



Curt Knapp Collection

2ND BDE TOC WITH COL JOHN A. HOEFLING, LZ SALLY 1968

## Events That Turn Commanders Head's Gray

On the morning of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968, a small group of six vehicles from the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company rolled out of LZ Sally, under the command of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Frank Linster. At the junction of Highway 1, we joined the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division convoy headed south to Da Nang. We encountered a 3/4 ton truck that had run off the road and proceeded to pull it out of the ditch. LT Linster was standing in the ditch, directly in front of the truck. . . BAD IDEA! As the chain came tight, the driver gunned the engine as he released the clutch. The truck exploded up the embankment lifting LT Linster through the air, planting him on his back side in a tangle of concertina wire. We literally had to cut him loose. His injuries required a brief stop in Phu Bai, for treatment of the puncture wounds in his ass and a tetanus shot. LT Linster learned a very big lesson that day!! As we approached the Hai Van pass, the highway narrowed to a single lane, as it wound its way to the summit. As the column moved forward, sniper fire erupted to our right front. Bailing out of the trucks, we sought cover along the drainage ditch until the ALL CLEAR was sounded. The snipers were taken under fire by jeep mounted 106 mm recoilless rifles. Due to sporadic sniper fire, the 60 mile drive took 12 hours. We pulled into the Tien Shaw Navy Base, stowing our gear and weapons in the barracks we would call home for the next week. The Permanent Change of Station move north from Dau Tieng, along with the heavy fighting during Tet had left everyone physically and emotionally spent.

The next morning, LT Linster informed us that it would take some time to locate everything we needed and that we should enjoy our leave in Da Nang. SP/4 John Moore, SP/4 Dennis Pierpoint (A.K.A. Point), and SP/4 Dick Detra (A.K.A. Cherry Boy) grabbed the lone 3/4 ton Dodge truck and headed for the bar. Once we were settled in at one of the local bars, a beautiful Vietnamese bar girl approached us. She showed us numerous photos of herself and shared her dreams of becoming a movie star. Moments later a merchant seaman named Blackie, told John that he was the spitting image of his son. After a few drinks, he took us on board the SS Cortez to meet the Captain and crew. To our surprise the entire cargo consisted of Black Label beer and whiskey. When we left the ship, we were feeling no pain as we drove through the Navy Shore Patrol (SP) check point at the ship yard's main gate. After passing through the Army Military Police (MP) check point, Cherry Boy swerved into the wrong lane. John and Point were screaming at him to get over before we collided head on with a tractor trailer coming towards us. It was too late to avoid hitting the row of barrels positioned in front of the ARVN Police (AP) check point. Barrels were flying in all directions until we hit the last one, which was filled with concrete. The collision caused damage to the left front quarter and bumper. The AP's stood in awe as we sped past them.

Cherry Boy was approached by one of our Warrant Officers the next morning, informing him that if the damaged truck wasn't repaired before we got back to LZ Sally, he could expect an Article 15. He pulled into the Army motor pool across the road and made a deal with a couple of the mechanics. They would replace the left front quarter and bumper for twenty cases of beer. Leaving the 3/4 ton with the mechanics he was picked up by John and Point in a deuce and a half. When they arrived at the bar, Blackie told us that the Captain was having a dinner in our honor and wouldn't it be nice to bring some women on board. Point and Cherry Boy, after negotiating a price, convinced the bar girl to come along. The only draw back was that we had to bring her younger brother.

We made it safely through the three check points and parked the deuce and a half a short distance away from the ship. As we made our way up the gangway, several of the Vietnamese workers observed us as we boarded the ship. As we entered the galley, we introduced our guests to the Captain and crew. A stateroom adjacent to the galley would be used as our little love nest. The plan was for everyone to take turns, beginning with you know who. The cook had baked a number of apple pies for us to take as well. The party was well under way when one of the crewmen, standing night watch, ran into the galley. Everyone gathered around as he told the Captain that three jeep loads of AP's, MP's and SP's were headed towards the ship. The workers had ratted us out! Point pounded on the stateroom door, yelling at John that it was time to leave. Since it was John's turn in the love nest, he refused to come out. He figured that Point was joking and disregarded the story about SP's boarding the ship. Point and Cherry Boy bolted through the galley, grabbing four apple pies, en route to the gangway. In their haste to board the ship, the SP's paid little or no attention to the two soldiers who were disembarking. As for John, with Blackie's help, he was able to elude capture. Noticing that the deuce and a half was gone, he made a bee line for the main gate. He desperately tried to hitch a ride as he watched the girl and young boy being escorted off the ship. As they headed in his direction, John knew he was going to the brig. At the last moment a truck pulled in front of the jeeps, blocking their view. The driver motioned for him to get in and offered to take him back to Tien Shaw. Lying in their bunks, fully clothed under the covers, waiting for the SP's to arrive, Point and Cherry Boy knew in their hearts that John had been arrested. Suddenly, the barracks door flew open. John, nearly out of breath, came scrambling down the aisle to his bunk. After discussing our escape, we realized how lucky we were not to have been caught and court martialled.

In the morning, we were surprised to find twenty cases of Black Label beer in the back of the deuce and a half, under a tarp. Compliments of the Captain and crew of the SS Cortez. We definitely fired up the mechanics at the motor pool when we unloaded the 20 cases of Black Label beer. Cherry Boy thanked them once again for saving him from an Article 15. The rest of the day was spent loading our trucks at the various supply depots.

Supply Sergeant Jackson and Sergeant Larry Gray borrowed a Navy reach in cooler and a Marine generator so our beer and sodas would be nice and cold. A number of our guys had put up the money to purchase the beer and sodas. At the Army supply depot, our supply sergeant was informed that he didn't have the proper paper work to requisition a wrecker, badly needed by our maintenance people. In the confusion of trucks coming and going, Larry leisurely walked down the long row of wreckers, picked one, got in, fired it up, and drove off. LT Linster was busy appropriating a total of eight new trucks using phoney tags. The original unit information stenciled on the front bumpers was painted over with the 188<sup>th</sup> unit information. Once loaded, our orders were to form up at the Marine truck assembly area adjacent to Highway 1. By the end of the fourth day, we were loaded with everything we could requisition, beg, borrow, or steal.

On the morning of the seventh day, the Colonel in command of the convoy told LT Linster that we were being extended one more

day. LT Linster explained that he was given a direct order by his commanding office, Major Jack Johnson, to be back at LZ Sally no later than nightfall of the seventh day. LT Linster was sure that the CO would give him a bad rating if the convoy wasn't back on time. The Colonel's response was that he would revoke those orders. LT Linster turned and walked back to the rear of our trucks, motioning everyone to gather round, to discuss our options. Another problem surfaced. Since beer was NON COMBAT ESSENTIAL, we were ordered by the Marine load master to unload all of it. Beer was not authorized north of Hue. We all decided that we had only one option, to get the beer and soda back to LZ Sally or it would be our collective asses!!!

Our plan was put into action, as Sergeant Larry Gray's deuce and a half crashed through the main gate, with the rest of our trucks close behind. The Marine guards looked on as we sped through the gate. The driver of the 5 ton, 30 foot low boy refused to drive the vehicle on the return trip. LT Linster took over and drove the 5 ton low boy as fast as he could go, ordering the lead jeep to keep pace ahead of him. LT Linster figured that if we drove wide open and did encounter sniper fire or an ambush, our speed would carry us through the kill zone. Our luck held, as we made our way through the Hai Van pass unscathed. Just north of Hue, several Vietnamese children threw hand grenades at our passing trucks. The only damage we sustained were a couple of blown rear dual tires on one of our deuce and a halves. Our mad dash back to LZ Sally had only taken 2 ½ hours. Nothing of our exploits ever came back to haunt us. Thanks to our C.O.'s bending of the rules, everyone in the company would be enjoying a cold beer or soda tonight and for many nights to come. The Battalion XO, major Henry Dreher, got word of our little caper from a couple of bird dog pilots stationed at Da Nang, who had served under him in Korea. He never mentioned the incident to the Battalion CO, LTC Steen.

### **BW6 Comments**

In the process of exchanging information during the development of the unit history, Jack Johnson found out the details of this trip to Da Nang thirty-one years after the events took place. Johnson's comments to Dick Detra were to the effect, "There are many things that I didn't know about and I'm glad that I didn't know about them at the time. If I had known, I probably would have had to take action that would have put people in jail and caused my relief of command. But now — it just shows how wild and crazy things were when we were trying to survive and make the best out of what we had."

To address his actions with respect to having cold beer in LZ Sally, Johnson stated, "When I met with the command group of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, I was fully aware of the order to have no alcohol north of the Hai Van Pass. This would be virtually impossible since young officers, Warrant Officers, and crewmen on very mobile helicopters could very easily get into Da Nang and load up at the PX. I put out the word that in the 188<sup>th</sup> we would have cold beer on a limited basis available in the "clubs" we set up for the men. We would dispatch a helicopter to the Da Nang PX and they would load a pallet of beer (144 cases) into one of our slicks. A pallet would fit very nicely into the cargo compartment and we would land the slick in the middle of our company area and move the cargo to our club area."

Johnson commented that this was done to keep the fact that the 188<sup>th</sup> had beer away from the rest of the infantry that surrounded the living area. Some how the word got out and in the middle of the night the 188<sup>th</sup> was infiltrated by a bunch of infantry troops who made off with about half of the supply of beer. "Now, I couldn't complain to the Brigade Commander about his troops taking something that shouldn't be there in the first place, so we consolidated our supply and had to put guards on it 24 hours a day," Johnson said.

Later, Johnson learned that Col Cushman was aware that the 188<sup>th</sup> had beer in the area, and he elected to not take any action so long as the 188<sup>th</sup> did our job and kept things quiet. Since the 188<sup>th</sup> lived with and supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade almost exclusively, they were very close to the infantry troops they took into battle each day. There were a few times that the 188<sup>th</sup> even flew out a couple of beers a piece to a night defensive position along with the evening meal for the grunts.

### **Operation Delaware - The Road To the A Shau Valley**

On 19-21 April 1968 the First Brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division initiated Operation Delaware. The mission was to establish a series of Fire Support Bases along Highway 547 leading west from Camp Eagle to the A Shau Valley in order to support other combat actions in the future with direct field artillery fires. The first combat assault was to be lead by the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC into FSB Veghel with the 188<sup>th</sup> following as the second element of the first lift. The LZ was so small that the lifts had to be broken down into flights of five aircraft. The first two lifts were 17<sup>th</sup> AHC aircraft and the next two lifts were 188<sup>th</sup> AHC aircraft. Major Jack Johnson was flying in the lead aircraft of the first flight of five from the 188<sup>th</sup>.

We moved out of Eagle in a trail of four flights of five en route to Veghel. The weather was low clouds with some mountain top ridges obscured and some ground fog. The lead flight of five Kingsman made their approach into the LZ with very little ground fire being received. As they lifted off the second flight of Kingsman aircraft on short final came under heavy ground fire. When the 188<sup>th</sup> flight got on short final for the third lift in, all five of the Black Widows reported receiving fire and one aircraft in front of BW6, a 17<sup>th</sup> helicopter, was doing a side roll over in the LZ. As the BW flight continued on in, they could see people running from the aircraft into a large bomb crater just short of the downed aircraft, so BW6 lead our lift into a landing just short of the crater and the downed aircraft.

The lift touched down and pulled out while BW6 discharged his troops and waited until the crew from the downed aircraft got out of the crater and ran over to our aircraft. BW6 didn't realize that the next lift continued to come on in and, in one of the aircraft on the right side of the formation, WO Robert Spradlin, Black Widow 13, was playing combat photographer taking pictures of our landing. (During the VHPA reunion in San Antonio, Texas 1999, Bob gave BW6 several pictures he had taken during that combat assault. The first shows BW6's



aircraft on the ground with the crew from the Kingsman helicopter, at least two of them, running to get in our aircraft. The next picture shows the downed aircraft just before Spradlin touches down and you can see another soldier beside the tail boom of the rolled over helicopter.)

Later that day when we were reassembled at Camp Eagle we realized that the 17<sup>th</sup> AHC maintenance ship with Captain Olsen and 5 others was missing. We went out but because of continued low visibility and fog we couldn't do an adequate search of the area. Their aircraft was not found until years later when part of the tail boom was found with the aircraft serial number, but the main fuselage was not recovered and the remains of the crew are still MIA.

Source: Jack O. Johnson, CO 188<sup>th</sup>, Dec 67 - Jun 68





## **Tank's are Moving to Attack LZ Sally!!**

Can you believe it, this was the word we received one night in May of 1968 as we sent out the Spiders to do battle with the tanks. The 101<sup>st</sup> Division TOC was reporting "tanks advancing toward LZ Sally with accompanying infantry."

The field phone which connected the CO's tent at LZ Sally to Black Widow OP's woke Major Johnson up sometime in the middle of the night during May of 1968. The duty officer told BW6 that the standby Spider Fire Team was being sent out to Recon, an area northwest of Sally, where the division's ground based radar had picked up tanks and infantry maneuvering toward LZ Sally. The weather was pretty bad, broken overcast with a couple of hundred feet clearance, a mile or so of visibility and not much moon—one hell of a time to be doing a low level recon for tanks. BW6 told the Op's duty officer to send out the guns, but get the C&C crew together ASAP so they could really get a fix on what was happening. The Division has all of their LOH's and C&C's on the pad and all of their crews were sleeping peacefully because none of them were going out with the guns.

As soon as the C&C had a crew together, they blasted off to go find the tanks. The radio conversations with the TOC and the radar operators over the FM was unbelievable. There was true panic in their voices and they were convinced that we were going to be hit—soon. This was the first time anyone, human or radar, had seen evidence of tanks in our area, so there was some question, at least in BW6's mind, that there were any tanks around, but he couldn't take a chance that they really weren't there.

The guns were covering the area low level, we were a 200 feet up against the cloud base and the artillery at LZ Sally were doing the best they could to put illumination over the area where the radar was showing the tanks. To tell you the truth, everyone was more worried about all of us running into one of the burned out illumination round parachutes than we were about getting shot by a force of tanks and infantry. The radar operators on FM were directing us in our search, and they were just about to go nuts. After we had been out about 20 to 30 minutes, BW6 asked the radar guys, "How fast are the tanks approaching Sally?" His response was, "Their coming at us at 36 miles an hour and they have infantry all around them!!" This just didn't make much sense so I responded, "If that infantry is keeping up with tanks moving at 36 miles per hour, they would be one hell of a track team." There was absolute dead silence on the Radar/TOC patch and then the TOC said, "Roger that. Black Widows—return to base—mission terminated."

We returned to LZ Sally and after we secured the aircraft, the company got on the horn to the TOC. They admitted that there must have been some "Operator Error" on the part of the radar section and that they would take care of it. There was some suspicion that maybe during long boring nights in a radar hut, the operators would blow a little grass or down a little booze and see things that weren't there. And then, they may have just wanted to add some excitement to their life and watch us flap around for a while.

In any case, that was the first and last time that the Black Widows went out to locate and do battle with tanks to save LZ Sally. We all had a pretty good laugh about the whole thing over the next couple of days.

Source: Jack Johnson, BW 6, Jun 67-Dec 68

## **Loss of Life Hurts - This Loss Hurt Very Much**

At 1300 hours on 18 May 1968, First Sergeant Pearl Ackley (TOP) held a company formation. During the formation he assigned various details and then marched the group to the north end of the company area in order to have a police call of the area. During the police call, TOP entered the service platoon tent and found PFC Leroy McKeever sitting on a bunk. It appeared that McKeever had been drinking, so he asked him why he wasn't at his assigned place of duty. His response was, "TOP wasn't his First Sergeant." At that time TOP instructed him to go to the orderly room and stand by. At 1325 hours, after arriving back at the orderly room, TOP tried to reason with McKeever, but was told that he wanted to talk to his 603<sup>rd</sup> Detachment First Sergeant, Joe Helvey and the Commander, Captain Thomas Castro. TOP instructed McKeever to sit down in the orderly room until he could locate SFC Helvey. He then informed the company clerk, SP/4 Mike Vickroy to watch McKeever and to accompany him if he had to use the latrine to insure that he returned to the orderly room. Shortly after TOP's departure, McKeever got up and walked outside the orderly room with Vickroy a few steps behind. Having just arrived, SFC Helvey ordered McKeever to stand by the conex container located next to the orderly room while Vickroy called the XO, Captain John Schaibly. The company commander, Major Jack O. Johnson, was on R&R at the time, leaving Captain Schaibly in command. At 1345 hours, McKeever left the front of the orderly room and headed for the command bunker on the company's perimeter. He arrived at the command bunker with a loaded M-16 rifle. He then confronted several of the security guards and told them to "keep the fuck away" or "he would kill them." The sergeant of the guard, SP/5 Dan Wooley talked McKeever into clearing his weapon and cautioned him about threatening people with a loaded weapon. He tried to talk some sense into McKeever. His response was that he was upset over being repeatedly denied personal leave and was tired of these people "fucking with him." He then headed for bunker 85 located a short distance from the command bunkers. One of the guards followed McKeever to see what he was up to. As he approached, McKeever placed a round in the chamber of his M-16 and told the guard to go back to the command bunker. When McKeever entered bunker 85, Wooley tried to call the 101<sup>st</sup> MP detachment by the base main gate, but was unable to get through. Now besides the loaded M-16, McKeever carried a bandolier of M-16 ammunition over his shoulder and several grenades. As he passed the command bunker, McKeever tossed the bandolier and two grenades up to one of the guards standing on top. As he passed, he threw his weapon to Wooley and said that "he was turning himself in." Thinking that the incident was over, Wooley cleared the weapon and headed to the orderly room to turn in McKeever's M-16. SP/4 Jackson, who was headed for the perimeter, crossed paths with McKeever and noticed he was holding a grenade in his right hand. He yelled to McKeever, "Don't do it! Don't do it!" Then Jackson and SP-4 Harris grabbed him and tried to get hold of the grenade. After a short scuffle, McKeever got loose. Harris asked him, "what's going on?" He said, "I'm going to fix a couple of people who have been messing with me!" Then Harris made another grab for the grenade resulting in McKeever stepping back and pulling the pin on the grenade.

When he reached the orderly room, he was met by SFC Helvey and confronted about the incident on the bunker line. McKeever, at this point, started to yell and threaten Helvey, drawing a group of on-lookers. Inside the orderly room, a crew chief, taking care of some personal business, heard someone yell, "He has a grenade." Captain Schaibly, Vickroy, and the crew chief ran out the back door of the orderly room as the on-lookers heard the destructive sound of the grenade arming itself and scattered in all directions. McKeever held out the grenade, not realizing that it was about to detonate, to SFC Helvey. Helvey froze, making no attempt to run. The explosion tore through both men, sending body parts flying in all directions. Shrapnel fragments hit SP/4 Camp in the back, SP/4 Jackson was hit in the lower chest and the crew chief in the right thigh.

Vickroy, Harris, and several others tried to help Helvey, who was still alive, until medics from B Company 326<sup>th</sup> medical Battalion arrived. McKeever, who took the brunt of the blast, lost his right arm and right leg and was pronounced dead at the scene. Helvey and Jackson were medevaced in one of our Hueys to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Surgical Hospital in Phu Bai two hours and forty-five minutes later, he died from multiple fragmentation wounds and excessive hemorrhaging of his right femoral artery, at 1705 hours. Jackson, Camp, and the crew chief were treated for their wounds and returned to the company.

**Footnote:** At Dau Tieng, while under the influence of alcohol, McKeever threatened SP/4 Dan Scribner and in another incident, SP/4 Richard Kaplan, with a loaded weapon. This resulted in McKeever being taken off flight status, busted down to PFC and being transferred into the 603<sup>rd</sup> TC Detachment. The one person he did confide in was SP/4 Neal Haber. McKeever left two letters with Vickroy to hold for him prior to the murder/suicide. If McKeever had been transferred out of the unit, for medical help, after these two incidents, maybe this would never have happened.

**Source:** Department of the Army, Criminal Investigation Command, Office of the Provost Marshall, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

**Footnote by Jack Johnson:** As Commanding Officer of the 188<sup>th</sup> at the time this incident took place, I was shocked and very saddened at this turn of events. I was within a few days of Change of Command when the 308<sup>th</sup> Battalion Commander, LTC Steen, gave me permission to go on a 5 day R&R to Bangkok. I had been in country nine months and in command for six months without a day off and was in need of a little break. We had tactically supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade in virtually cleaning out the area of operations of all major NVA/VC units. Some time off was warranted before I turned over command of the unit to Hank Dreher and moved to Executive Officer of the 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion for the last three months of my tour.

As I was preparing to leave the company area, I looked out of the orderly room (tent) and I saw a 2 ½ ton truck racing across a series of rice paddy dikes, bouncing into the air, and crashing down with great force. Keeping trucks in good repair was critical to our company and this type of driving was unacceptable. I ordered someone to get the driver and bring him to me. It turned out to be McKeever and I chewed him out as he should have been for his treatment of our equipment. He left the orderly room and within fifteen minutes I had boarded one of our helicopters and was flown to Da Nang for a flight to Bangkok.

When I returned from R&R I reported into the HQ's of the 16<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Group, our senior aviation Headquarters, where everyone broke the news of the incident at the 188<sup>th</sup> Headquarters. I was not aware that anything had happened until I got back. I got one of the 16<sup>th</sup> CAG helicopters to fly me back to LZ Sally immediately and found the unit to be in a really depressed mood. McKeever should have been moved out and sent to a hospital long before this incident. I was unaware of the number of times he had threatened others in the 603<sup>rd</sup> Detachment with loaded weapons at Dau Tieng and LZ Sally. All of the details of his prior bizarre behavior came out during the CID investigation that followed the deaths of McKeever and Helvey. I feel sure that McKeever was out to frag me with the grenade he had, but met SGT Helvey on his way to the orderly room. The loss of anyone under circumstances like this hurts deeply because it's so unnecessary when there were plenty of other NVA/VC troops out there trying to do harm to us.

### **Change of Command — A New Commander's Thoughts**

On June 10, 1968, Major Jack O. Johnson handed over command of the 188<sup>th</sup> to Major Hank Dreher. The first time that I saw LZ Sally, I was truly amazed. Right in the middle of this base camp was an old Japanese Airfield. I am certain that it was on all the VC and NVA maps . . . what a reference point and target! The company area and our part of the perimeter was relatively flat, low ground with a large boomerang shaped rice paddy in the middle. The living areas were meager, GP medium tents, which were well sand bagged.

The work areas (maintenance, mess, medical, motor-pool, etc.) were well laid out and adequate. We had showers, but no hot water. The helicopters, although dispersed and revetted, were sitting targets, yet we never lost any on the ground. Our sector of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade perimeter left a lot to be desired, both in tactical capability and fortifications. There was a small rise to the south east that obscured long range observation. The Brigade S-3 assured me that they had it well covered with artillery and mortars. We never had to put them to the test. Our gun emplacements and defensive firing positions may have withstood a minor probe, but we would have been asking for a lot of help if it had been prolonged and massed. Once we received the material to build the DePuy bunkers, I was much more confident. There were several reasons why I decided to take command of the 188<sup>th</sup>.

1. I knew all the brigade and battalion Commanders that the 188<sup>th</sup> supported.
2. The 188<sup>th</sup> was at a separate location and I like to get as far away from the flag pole (Battalion) as possible.
3. The 188<sup>th</sup> did have a much lower availability aircraft rate than the 17<sup>th</sup> and I knew I could get it higher. At the change of command on 10 June 1968 we were at 45-50% or less, within two months we hit 100%. Of course, I have to tip my hat to our 603<sup>rd</sup> maintenance officer, Major Murry Parker, for that. I left the C/101 Black Widows after the Change of Command on 10 December 1968. When I was waiting to

leave country, I ran into Warrant officer Tuttle and a few of the other Spider pilots in Saigon. They were there to pick up some Cobra's. It was like Christmas and kids with new toys and they damn well deserved them. When the Spiders became D Company 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion (HAWK) the gunships stayed at LZ Sally even though they belonged to D/101 at Camp Eagle.

I cannot undo the past and, therefore, will not speculate on or comment on what I would change. I will say that I wish I had done more for the Enlisted Personnel. I commanded four Aviation Units during my three tours and the 188th/C/101 Black Widows were, by far, the finest and hold the fondest memories.

As a Commander, I felt that the crew chiefs were the most dedicated, hardest working, and least recognized personnel in all of Army Aviation in Vietnam. The helicopter they crewed was their aircraft and they took great pride in taking care of it. While I always pre-flighted my aircraft, there were many times that this was probably unnecessary because the ships were in A-1 condition even with the amount of flight hours being flown. The thing that I revered most about my pilots is that they followed me whenever I lead them and went where ever I told them to go . . . we never aborted a mission.

Source: Colonel Hank Dreher (Retired), Black Adler 5 - 188th/C/101 Black Widow 6

## **Command and Control North**

During my first tour in Vietnam, I flew 1105 hours of combat time, including hours in support of CCN (MAC-SOG) missions. The Black Widows were assigned to fly CCN missions two to three days a week.

One of these missions was to extract a Special Forces (SF) A Team from the jungle. It was scheduled to be a routine extraction. Our slicks were rigged with ladders and McGuire Ropes. The SF Team was located on a plateau. As we were approaching the pick-up zone (PZ) the team was spotted and had to move off of the plateau. When this happened we were approximately 20 minutes from their location.

When we arrived at their new location there was not enough room to land the helicopter on the ground, so we decided to use the ladders for pick-up. When we dropped the ladders they were too short and did not reach the ground. At that time I had my helicopter hovering over the treetops. My Crew Chief, SP/5 Mike Willie, told me if I was real careful and moved the tail boom to the left I could lower the helicopter closer to the ground, but I would have my tail rotor between two trees. Once this maneuver was accomplished the SF A Team started to climb up the ladders, one on each side of the aircraft. As the weight on the ladders increased, I was required to add power to keep my helicopter from settling into the trees. Once I had reached my maximum power setting, the aircraft started to settle into the trees. As my main rotor blades were within inches of hitting the trees, I radioed to the SF A Team that I had to leave and our second helicopter would pick-up the rest of the team. The SF A Team radio operator told me to leave because all of the team members were on the ladders. I informed them to hold on because I would have to drag them through the trees. Their response was, "what was I waiting for, the NVA were coming into the clearing." Once again, we came under heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. We were very lucky to have our Spider gunships with us on this mission as they laid down a deadly volume of suppressive fire. The SF A Team, our door gunner, and crew chiefs all were helping with suppressive fire from their weapons. If anyone had wanted to contact us on the radio, we would never have heard the call because of all the weapons firing on full automatic, better known as "rock and roll." The action by our gunships allowed us to escape by the skin of our teeth. The ledge of the plateau was a short distance away. Once we cleared the trees, I could see the SF A Team members throwing branches away that had gotten caught on their TA 50 equipment. Little did I know, each A Team member had used D-rings to clamp themselves on the ladder so they wouldn't fall off as I dragged them through the trees, and in case they were wounded in the extraction.

As we were flying back to base camp, eight of the twelve A Team members had to stay on the ladders. They could not crawl up the ladder because of the wind force as we were departing the area at 100 knots. We needed to get as much distance between the enemy and us because they had 50 caliber machine guns with them as the Team informed us as we departed.

The eight A Team members who were sitting on the ladders created a problem for them because the ladder bars were only one inch in diameter and was cutting off the blood flow to their feet. We had to find a place to land and get these men off the ladder before we caused permanent damage to their legs. We sent one of the back-up slicks to locate a safe landing zone (LZ). We had to disregard radio silence on this mission because the welfare of our Team members was more important. We did not snatch them from the jaws of the enemy just to have them injured on the flight home. Our search for a relatively safe LZ was successful. The abandoned base camp at Khe Sahn was selected. Our advance slick had made several passes over the base camp and no one had bothered them. As we approached Khe Sahn, the advanced slick landed so their crew members could help the SF guys off the ladders. Their legs were asleep because of low blood flow. I was required to hover the aircraft about 75 feet off the ground while the first two SF team members were taken off the ladder. This was repeated a total of four times until we had everyone off the ladder. We then landed ourselves to let the SF's medic check out the condition of his team members before continuing on to LZ Stud.

After we had refueled, we returned to Mia Loc and debriefed the SF Battalion Intelligence officer. After the debriefing, we were allowed to check our aircraft for battle damage. Once again, the luck and skill of the Black Widows and Spiders aircraft and crews held true to form. We did not have a single bullet hole in any of the aircraft.

Source: LTC Frank Linster

## Operations

### III Corps Area of Operations

Operation	Date	Major Unit Supported
Great Bend	13 June - 26 June 1967	3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 9 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Can Giuoc	19 June - 20 June 1967	3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 9 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Manhattan	23 April - 7 June 1967	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Ahina	13 May - 18 May 1967	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Kawela	11 June - 25 June 1967	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Kolekole	14 May - 17 December 1967	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Barking Sands	14 May - 17 December 1967	1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade, 25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Diamond Head	14 May - 17 December 1967	3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Cau Song Be Special Forces Camp	September/October 1967	5 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces B-34-CIDG
Shenandoah II	27 September - 19 November 1967	1 <sup>st</sup> Infantry Division
Game Warden Task Force 116	November/December 1967	Navy Seal Team I (NHA BE)
Atlanta	18 November - 23 December 1967	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Yellowstone	1 December 1967 - 24 February 1968	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Saratoga	8 December 1967 - 11 March 1968	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Coronado IX	1 November 1967 - 22 February 1968	3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 9 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Rapid Fire V (Cambodia)	8 December 1967 - 24 January 1968	5 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces B-36
Ranch Hand	1967 - 1968	7 <sup>th</sup> Air Force (Agent Orange Spraying)
Tet '68	31 January - 18 February 1968	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Resolved To Win	January/February 1968	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division
Toan Thang	1 February - 10 March 1968	25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

### II Corps Area of Operation

Operation	Date	Major Unit Supported
Hong Kil Dong	9 July - 31 August 1967	9 <sup>th</sup> Republic of Korea (ROK) White Horse and Capital (Tiger) Division

### I Corps Area of Operation

Operation	Date	Major Unit Supported
Carentan I	8 March - 31 March 1968	101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division
Carentan II	1 April - 17 May 1968	101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division
Delaware/ Lam Son 216	19 April - 17 May 1968	101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division
Nevada Eagle	17 May - 1 July 1968	101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division
Ranch Hand	1968	7 <sup>th</sup> Air Force (Agent Orange Spraying)
Prairie Fire (Laos)	April/June 1968	CCN - SOG
Allen Brook	4 May - 24 August 1968	1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Division
Mameluke Thrust	4 May - 24 August 1968	1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Division
Swift Saber	4 May - 24 August 1968	1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Division
Eager Yankee	May/June 1968	3 <sup>rd</sup> Marine Division

# Battles

## III Corps

1.	June 24, 1967	Mortar attack on Dau Tieng airfield (The Web)
2.	August 30, 1967	Iron Triangle, Ambushed while inserting the 4/9 Manchus into the Horseshoe area of the Saigon River
3.	November 9, 1967	Mortar and ground attack on 188 <sup>th</sup> Company area and perimeter at Dau Tieng
4.	January 1, 2, 1968	Tactical Emergency, FSB Burt was being hit with massive human wave attack
5.	January 13, 1968	Mortar and ground attack on the 188 <sup>th</sup> company area and perimeter
6.	Tet '68	Supported of the 25 <sup>th</sup> Division's 3/4 CAV assault to reopen Highway 1 and relieve the siege on Ton Son Nhut Air Base, Ap Cho, Cu Chi City

## I Corps

1.	April 28, 1968	Phuoc Yen, commonly referred to as The Stocking because of its appearance from the air. 107 POW's were taken during this battle, the highest number taken during the entire war, by the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.
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## Reorganization

On July 1, 1968, the 188<sup>th</sup> was deactivated and designated as Charlie Company 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion (C/101) Black Widows. The Spiders became the third platoon in the newly formed D Company (gunships) 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation battalion. First platoon was formally the Black Angels of B/101 and second platoon was formally the 17<sup>th</sup> Guns, the Lancers. Even though D/101 was located at Camp Eagle at this time, the Spiders stayed at LZ Sally to support the C/101 Black Widows. The Black Widows left LZ Sally in April of 1969 and set up shop at their final station, Phu Bai.

The Black Widows and Spiders had built a reputation for getting the SOG and 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces teams into and out of some very precarious situations and were often asked for directly by name to support covert operations. Listed below are the C/101 operations in Northern I Corps.

### Black Widow Operations in I Corps 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (C/101)

Nevada Eagle (Thua Thien Province) (*During Nevada Eagle, the 188 <sup>th</sup> , 17 <sup>th</sup> , 200 <sup>th</sup> , and 272 <sup>nd</sup> were redesignated as part of the 101 <sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division, and the new C/101 Black Widows took over the fight.)	2/68 - 2/69
Somerset Plain (Ashau Valley)	8/4 - 8/21/69
Lam Son 261	9/68 - 4/69
Kentucky Jumper (Thua Thien Province)	3/69 - 8/69
Massachusetts Striker (Thua Thien Province)	4/69 - 8/69
Apache Snow (Ashau Valley)	5/69 - 6/69
Lamar Plain (Tam Ky)	5/69 - 8/69
Montgomery Rendezvous (Ashau Valley)	6/69 - 7/69
Richland Square (Thua Thien Province)	8/69 - 9/69
Republic Square (Thua Thien Province)	8/69 - 12/69
Saturate (Thua Thien Province)	10/69 - 12/69
Randolf Glen (Thua Thien Province)	12/69 - 3/70
Texas Star (Thua Thien Province)	4/69 - 9/69
Jefferson Glen (Thua Thien Province) (Jefferson Glen - Last major US operation in Vietnam)	9/70 - 10/70
Lam Son 719 (Ashau Valley/Laos) (*Lam Son designates Vietnamese Operations.)	3/71 - 5/71
Lam Son 810 (*Lam Son designates Vietnamese Operations.) (101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was the last US Army Division to leave the combat zone in February, 1972. The C/101 Black Widow's were there to the end.)	9/71

Source: Donald Pratt Museum, Fort Campbell, Kentucky.



# SOG



A Photo History of the Secret Wars



John L. Plaster

### U.S. HELICOPTER UNITS THAT FLEW FOR SOG

SOG helicopter support came mostly from outside aviation units, which rotated frequently, resulting in incomplete records. This partial roster, assembled from many fragmentary sources, gives recognition to fine pilots and crews who saved many SOG men's lives by risking their own.

#### SUPPORTING COMMAND AND CONTROL NORTH:

##### U.S. Army

2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry, 101st Airborne Division  
17th Aviation Company, 101st Airborne Division  
188th Assault Helicopter Company, 101st Airborne Division  
4th Battalion, 77th Aerial Rocket Artillery, 101st Airborne Division  
Co. C, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion  
Co. D, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion

##### U.S. Marine Corps

Marine aviation units began flying SOG missions from Khe Sanh in summer 1966 until the arrival of the 101st Airborne Division in I Corps following Tet 1968, with occasional support through the summer of 1970. Early missions were flown by HMM-165 with VMO-2, VMO-3, and VMO-6.

#### SUPPORTING COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTRAL:

##### U.S. Marine Corps

HMH-463 for Operation Tailwind, September 1970

##### U.S. Army

119th Assault Helicopter Company, 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion  
57th Assault Helicopter Company, 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion  
189th Assault Helicopter Company, 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion  
170th Assault Helicopter Company, 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion  
361st Aviation Company (Escort), The Pink Panthers

#### SUPPORTING COMMAND AND CONTROL SOUTH:

##### U.S. Air Force

20th Special Operations Squadron

##### U.S. Army

155th Assault Helicopter Company  
195th Assault Helicopter Company

#### THAILAND-BASED HELICOPTER UNITS (SUPPORTING CCN, CCC, AND THE STRATA PROGRAM):

##### U.S. Air Force

D Flight, 20th Special Operations Squadron  
21st Special Operations Squadron



**C COMPANY "BLACK WIDOWS" 101ST AVIATION BATTALION  
LZ SALLY - HUE PHU BAI VIETNAM**

# THE ENEMY

LOCAL FORCE VC IN THE MICHELIN RUBBER PLANTATION. PHOTO FROM  
DAU TIENG, TRI TAM DISTRICT ADVISORY TEAM #91. NOTICE WOMAN LOWER  
RIGHT LOWER CENTER PHOTO BLACKED OUT POSSIBLE VC INFORMANT.





Ron Merlock Collection

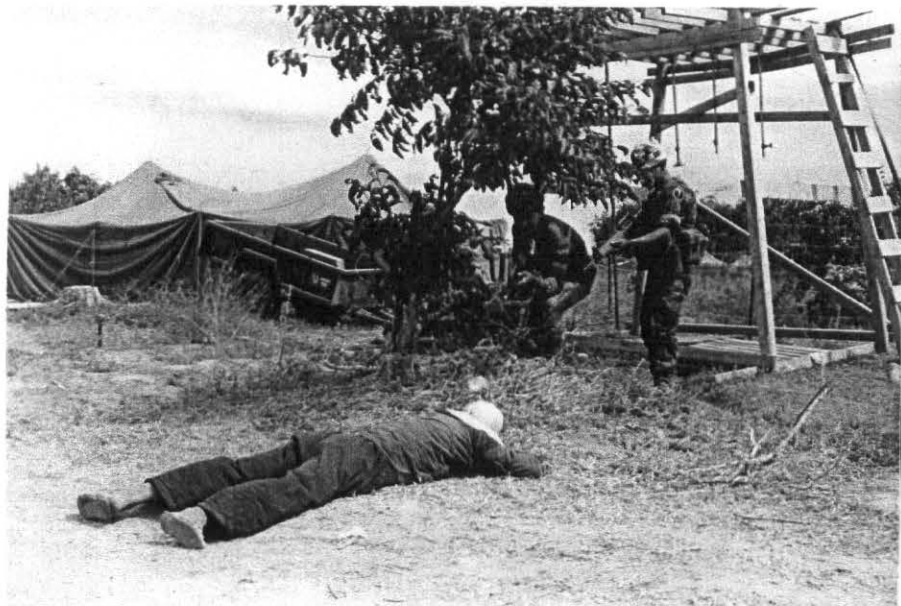
VC POW ONBOARD A BLACKWIDOW SLICK BEING TAKEN TO THE STOCKADE AT DAU TIENG. OPERATION BARKING SANDS, OCT. 67, 3/22 INFANTRY, 25TH INF. DIV.



Ron Merlock Collection

VC POW CAPTURED DURING OPERATION DIAMOND HEAD, 3RD BRIGADE 25TH INF. DIV., 2/12TH WHITE WARRIORS, WESTERN III CORPS A.O. SEP. 67.





Dick Detra Collection

POW'S BEING GUARDED BY  
"FREE CAMBODIA" MERCENARIES,  
TAY NINH EAST AIRFIELD, JAN 1968,  
DURING OPERATION RAPIDFIRE V.



Dick Detra Collection



Ron Merlock Collection

MP'S ESCORTING VC POW'S TO 3RD  
BRIGADE STOCKADE. BLACK WIDOW  
AIRGRAFT SHUTTING DOWN AT THE  
WEB AFTER TRANSPORTING POW'S  
IN FROM THE BATTLEFIELD.



Ed Atlee Collection

NVA AND MONTAGNARD POW'S. CAPTURED BY REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S WHITEHORSE DIVISION DURING OPERATION HONG KIL DONG, JULY 67.



Ron Merlock Collection

OPERATION HONG KIL DONG, AUG 67, ROK SOLDIERS FROM THE WHITHORSE DIVISION LOAD NVA POW'S INTO 2ND PLATOON SLICK.



US ARMY PHOTO

**1/502 INF BN SOLDIER ESCORTS AN NVA PRISONER TO THE REAR DURING  
OPERATION DELAWARE, APRIL 68. OPERATION CONDUCTED BY 2ND BRIGADE  
101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION, THUA THIEN PROVINCE.**



US ARMY PHOTO

**VIET CONG POW BEING INTERRIGATED BY 2ND BRIGADE, 2/502 INF BN INTELLIGENCE OFFICER  
AND VIETNAMESE INTERPRITOR. OPERATION CARENTAN I, MAR 68, THUA THIEN PROVENCE.**

**III Corps Statistics**  
**The Black Widows became operational on June 15, 1967**

	June	July	Aug.	1967 Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	1968 (TET) Feb.-March (1)
Sorties Flown	4165	7799	7519	8379	9399	6614	7528	5257	9754
Flight Total	1949	2422	2247	2797	3197	2336	2574	2052	3785
Flight Hours D (H) Model	1583	2114	1990	2225	2373	2267	2106	1647	No Data
Flight Hours B (C) Model	366	308	257	572	824	469	468	405	No Data
Passengers Carried	8704	11365	10885	13194	19608	12695	14068	7147	14418
Cargo Tons	178	1123	1106	119	151	178	92	269	169
VC KIA	32	—	2	12	16	1	8	7	47
Structures Destroyed	1	1	—	20	9	12	3	1	24
Sampan Destroyed	13	—	—	2	4	2	9	2	2
ACFT Combat Damage	**60	4	14	9	6	12	32	15	27
ACFT Hit	11	14	14	9	6	12	32	42	53
US KIA	***3	8	1	1	2	1	—	—	—
US WIA	29	—	10	1	5	12	1	7	1
MED EVAC	23	21	38	22	26	11	32	72	No Data
Combat Assault Missions	8	1	3	24	20	21	23	3	No Data

\*\*Includes 29 lost as a result of mortar attack 24 June

\*\*\*KIA's from May

(1) February - 10 March, 1968 - report format changed - did not list MED EVAC or Combat Assaults. Listen Up: Record keeping within the company was not very accurate on the number of aircraft hits . . . 188<sup>th</sup> Aircraft took beau-coup hits on numerous operations that were not reported. This can be confirmed by the men who flew in the unit.

Source: 269<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion Operational Reports Lessons Learned, June 1967 - March 1968

**III Corps and I Corps Statistics for the 308<sup>th</sup> CAB**  
**The Black Widows became operational on April 4 , 1968**

Since the Permanent Change of Station move to Camp Eagle occurred during this quarter, the totals are broken down between the III Corps Area of Operations and the I Corps Area of Operations. The 308<sup>th</sup> did not list totals for each individual company, only the Battalion. The original cast of players were the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company (Black Widows/Spiders), the 17<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company (Kingsman/Lancers), and the 200<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company (Pachyderms) (Chinook). The 272<sup>nd</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Company (Varsity) (Chinook) was assigned to the 308<sup>th</sup> on June 6, 1968. The Black Adlers were part of an Army Aviation build up in northern I Corps to provide air support for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and other major Army units moving into this Area of Operations. The original Black Widows and Spiders who had deployed with the company, rotated back to "The World" in April, 1968.

**308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion  
Camp Eagle, RVN, APO 96383**

	III CORPS 10 Feb - 12 March	I CORPS 1 April - 30 April	Total
1. Battalion Combat Assaults	1	0	1
2. Company Combat Assaults	47	33	80
3. Flying Hours	9,231	5,964	15,195
4. Passengers	41,760	31,675	73,435
5. Cargo (tons)	991	6,896	7,888
6. Sorties	26,212	20,852	47,064
7. Aircraft Damaged (hostile)	40	50	90
8. Damaged (operational)	2	1	3
9. Aircraft destroyed due to hostile act	4	1	5
10. Aircraft missing due to hostile act	0	1	1
11. U.S. KIA	2	1	3
12. U.S. WIA	9	7	16
13. U.S. missing due to hostile action	0	6	6
14. VC KIA (Body Count)	37	134	171
15. Structures Destroyed	90	24	114
16. Sampans Destroyed	5	0	5
17. Aircraft Recovered (CH-47)	N/A	10	10
18. Medical Evacuations	195	142	337

Source: 308<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion Operational Report, 30 April 1968

**I Corps Statistics**

**308<sup>th</sup> CAB - 159<sup>th</sup> ASHB - 101<sup>st</sup> AHB**

During this quarter the 308<sup>th</sup> was redesignated as the 159<sup>th</sup> ASHB on July 1, 1968. On that same day the 188<sup>th</sup> became Charlie Company 101<sup>st</sup> Assault Helicopter Battalion. Our sister company, the 17<sup>th</sup>, became B/101 of the newly formed Battalion. The 200<sup>th</sup> ASHC became A Company and the 272<sup>nd</sup> became B Company of the newly formed 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion. This quarterly report covered the 188<sup>th</sup> through July 1, 1968 and C/101 for the month of July. The 188<sup>th</sup> Black Widow's along with their sister units were instrumental in establishing the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division as the second Airmobile Division in the US Army. This transition symbolized the change from parachutes to helicopters for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. A new Black Widow era had arrived.

**May 1, 1968 - July 31, 1968**

Sorties Flown	18,281
Troops Lifted	38,531
Cargo Lifted (tons)	1,113
Enemy KIA	102
Structures Damaged	91
Structures Destroyed	51
Sampans Damaged	3
Sampans Destroyed	4
Aircraft Confirmed Lost	4 UH-1H
Aircraft Damaged	4 UH-1C, 17 UH-1H

Source: 159<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion Operational Report, 31 July 1968



**Killed in Action**  
**Location on "The Wall"**

Name	Date	Panel	Line	State	Name	Date	Panel	Line	State
<b>188<sup>th</sup> AHC:</b>					<b>Charlie CO</b>				
Richard L. Moore	5-17-67	20E	17	Illinois	101 <sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion				
Jerry I. Beckman	5-19-67	20E	39	Oklahoma	Harry Kim	8-5-68	49W	15	California
Harold E. Fetner	5-20-67	20E	58	New York	Richard S. Riley, Jr.	10-24-68	40W	30	New Jersey
Joseph W. Allwood	7-31-67	24E	53	Florida	David L. Sparks	10-24-68	40W	30	Colorado
Henry C. Cauthen, Sr.	7-31-67	24E	54	Mississippi	Wilofard A. McClain, II	3-28-69	28W	74	Texas
Rodney O. Davie	7-31-67	24E	54	Illinois	Eric V. Pulliam	3-28-69	28W	75	Maryland
Douglas R. Noel	7-31-67	24E	55	North Carolina	Ronald F. Ricciardo	3-28-69	28W	75	New York
James R. Poggemeyer	7-31-67	24E	56	Nebraska	William D. Richardson	8-21-69	19W	90	Tennessee
Wayne G. Van Lant	7-31-67	24E	57	California	Joe Carl Shaw	8-21-69	19W	90	New Mexico
Robert M. Wallace	7-31-67	24E	57	Ohio	Norman F. Paley	11-24-70	06W	82	Ohio
Paul E. Williams	7-31-67	24E	58	Illinois	Robert T. Callan	12-16-70	06W	124	Ohio
Alfred J. Smith	8-30-67	25E	72	New Jersey	Phillip D. Sharp	5-23-71	03W	52	California
James T. Donahue, Jr.	9-22-67	26E	111	Illinois	Steven J. Minkler	7-18-71	03W	110	Washington
Jimmie W. Green	10-13-67	27E	100	Florida	Rudolph Stevens	7-18-71	03W	110	Louisiana
Boyd E. Morrow	10-13-67	27E	102	Pennsylvania	Jay Steven Aston	7-18-71	03W	109	Ohio
Robert W. Watts	11-22-67	30E	67	Kentucky	Richard A. Crocker	3-17-72	02W	115	Pennsylvania
Joe D. Helvey	5-18-68	62E	18	Oklahoma					
Leroy McKeever	5-18-68	62E	21	Missouri					
<b>Former Black Widows:</b>									
Frank L. Kerbl	10-7-67	27E	65	New Jersey					
Ellis M. Bailey	10-11-67	27E	87	Texas					
David E. Thomas	11-3-67	29E	17	Missouri					
John Frederick Holz	12-19-67	32E	23	Pennsylvania					
Ronald Boysen Baker	2-10-70	14W	119	Pennsylvania					
Phillip Sharp	5-23-71	3W	52	California					
Charles C. Windeler, Jr.	4-5-72	02W	130	Georgia					
Dan C. Kingman	5-24-72	01W	30	Nebraska					

## Wounded in Action

This list is not complete

Name	Date	Name	Date	Name	Date
James Stepp	5-19-67	Gerald Dohrt	1-4-68	Gary Gordon	7-15-71
William Bramlett	5-19-67	John Newcomer	1-4-68	Bill Bengston	7-15-71
Arnold D. Amoroso	6-19-67	Tim Wingerd	1-4-68	David Breunstaal	7-18-71
Alfred L. Snook	6-19-67	Wesley Gager	1-7-68	Billy Shotwell	11-5-71
Joseph B. Matt	6-19-67	Charles Patrick	1-31-68	James G. Jarvis, Jr.	5-14-75
Stan Moody	6-19-67	Bill Crabbe	1-31-68		
Thomas Crumb	6-19-67	Douglas Crain	1-31-68		
Gerard L. Cabigon	6-20-67	Richard Toivonen	1-31-68		
David J. Anderson	6-20-67	Thomas McMillan	2-5-68		
George T. Andrews	6-24-67	Warren Wright	2-7-68		
Roger E. Blankenship	6-24-67	Geoff Handel	2-12-68		
Rodney O. Davie	6-24-67	William Stubbs	2-12-68		
Edward A. Desisto, Jr.	6-24-67	Rex K. Snyder	2-24-68		
Lewis T. Hodge	6-24-67	Gary Main	4-6-68		
Leroy J. Lamb	6-24-67	James Parrish	4-20-68		
Jimmy D. Moody	6-24-67	Harold Fugate	5-10-68		
Don C. Sparks	6-24-67	? Jackson	5-18-68		
Gary J. Walker	6-24-67	Harold Camp	5-18-68		
Hubert Arrowood	6-24-67	Harry S. Warren	5-22-68		
James R. Grindstaff	6-24-67	Robert Spradlin	5-25-68		
David J. Bryan	6-24-67	Robert E. Waggoner	5-27-68		
Joseph W. Wittner	6-24-67	Leo F. Williams, III	6-2-68		
Humbert A. DeGregory	6-24-67	Freddie Cowens	6-8-68		
Jack J. Cooley	6-24-67	Charlie Company, 101 <sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion			
John Rementer	6-24-67	Rex K. Snyder	6-24-68		
Clawson	6-24-67	Doug Spies	7-4-68		
David A. Beale	6-24-67	Doug Butts	7-12-68		
Larry T. Sanford	8-7-67	David Sparks	7-12-68		
Paul Geving	8-7-67	Robert Faires	7-12-68		
Richard Cadreau	8-7-67	John Sanchez	8-7-68		
Victor M. Sebastiano	8-9-67	Robert Burton	8-4-68		
Gregory L. Brantley	8-16-67	James Parrish	8-4-68		
Emery J. Pope	8-18-67	Mike Searls	8-4-68		
Ross Scott	8-27-67	Larry Clark	8-4-68		
Charles J. Restivo	8-30-67	Curt Gaskins	8-4-68		
James Trueblood	8-30-67	Gilbert Murphy	8-4-68		
William Sondey	8-30-67	Paul Wheeler	8-4-68		
Robert Matthes	8-30-67	Omer Hall	8-16-68		
Ed Pettinato	8-30-67	Timothy Metcalfe	8-18-68		
Harold E. Camp	9-15-67	Robert Holmes	9-7-68		
Bob Setzer	9-22-67	Mike Willie	10-7-68		
Jesse Johnson	10-10-67	Ted Smith	10-24-68		
Alfred T. Ladle	10-20-67	Ken Tuel	10-24-68		
Allan R. Dluski	10-25-67	Dennis Blankenship	11-7-68		
Robert L. Davis	11-3-67	John Crouch	3-22-69		
Maurice Charbonneau	11-9-67	Terry Manfred	3-7-69		
Phillip Snodgrass	11-9-67	Lonnie Heidtke	4-13-69		
James W. Searcy	11-9-67	Brent Shepley	5-1-69		
Charles M. Graham	11-9-67	Anthony Gonzalez	5-10-69		
Howard Liston	11-9-67	George C. Garich	5-31-69		
Ed Pettinato	11-9-67	David H. Hansen	5-31-69		
Holloway	11-9-67	William J. Karins	5-31-69		
Leo S. Howell	11-9-67	Thomas Palmer	1-10-70		
Leroy Lamb(after 2 <sup>nd</sup> WIA took over EMC)	11-17-67	Bill Crouch	5-8-70		
Danny Wooley	11-22-67	Ray Urbansky	10-20-70		
Tom Bartleson	11-22-67	Roger Caffrey	11-24-70		
Dennis Wolfe	11-25-67	David Carter	11-24-70		
Ray Scribner	12-15-67	Robert J. Pike	11-24-70		
Ronald Carpenter	1-1-68	Jon Evans	3-20-71		
William Stubbs	1-4-68	Robert Marks	5-10-71		



## The Juicers and the Heads

Marijuana found its way into the company shortly after setting up shop at Dau Tieng. It was cheap and readily available. Vietnamese of all ages, in and around Camp Rainier, tried to sell marijuana to the GI's. The going rate at that time was twenty dollars for a kilo (2.2 pounds). When the company moved north to LZ Sally, marijuana was sold by the carton. The Vietnamese would remove the tobacco from Marlboro and Kool cigarettes and replace it with marijuana. The packs of cigarettes were resealed and reinserted into the carton which was also resealed and sold for ten dollars a carton. You could also trade c-rations, soap, or anything of value, since that's how the Vietnamese usually did business.

There were those in the ranks who welcomed the chance to try something new, especially if it was against Army regulations. Like alcohol, marijuana helped take the edge off after flying in combat. When the flight crews called it a day, after flying long hours, they were ready for a hot shower, a cold beer, cocktail, or, in some cases, a soda and a joint. Everyone in the company was rationed two beers and two sodas a day. The heads would trade their beer ration to the juicer's for their soda rations. To hide the pungent aroma of the marijuana, the heads usually smoked close by the honey pots. There was always a light show going on at night outside the perimeter as flares, fire fights, artillery fire, gunships, Puff the Magic Dragon, or B-52 Arc Light strikes lit up the sky. Marijuana wasn't smoked in excess in the unit and when you got up at 0-dark thirty each morning, the heads didn't have to deal with the hangovers the juicers felt each morning. Knowing the need to be alert in combat, none of the heads flew under the influence of marijuana.

While at Dau Tieng, there was an incident involving one of the door gunners and 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Ramon DePalm, Sr. One night while inspecting the bunker line, this individual asked TOP if he wanted to share a joint with him inside one of the bunkers while he was on guard duty. Needless to say, TOP immediately called the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division MP's and had the young soldier arrested and taken away. He was brought up on charges of cultivating, possessing, and using marijuana at his Court Martial hearing. Plants were found under his hootch in the company area. For this individual, the story has a happy ending because in 1967 the United States Military Penal Code did not list marijuana as a prohibited substance. So, the charges were dropped and the case dismissed. TOP made life a living hell for this individual until he finally shipped him out to an aviation unit at Bear Cat.

## The "Widow's Web" Officer's Club - LZ Sally

The archway in front of the main entrance to the Officer's Club tent at LZ Sally consisted of a pair of crossed main rotor blades. Painted on the floor just inside the entrance was a 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division patch which was commonly referred to as the "Puking Buzzard" by the 188<sup>th</sup> pilots. There was a standing rule upon entering the club. If anyone failed to stomp on the Buzzard, they would have to buy the house a round of drinks. When the Black Widows became C/101, the rule was reversed; anyone stepping on the Buzzard would have to buy the house a round of drinks. This rule always generated free drinks, usually from Newbies and Officers from other units. This rule lasted until late 1968 when the C/101 pilots started to accept the 101<sup>st</sup> as one of us. One of the reasons the Black Widows had hard feelings towards the 101<sup>st</sup> was that they wanted to take any money that the club had over \$10,000 and transferred to the 101<sup>st</sup> Club Organization. So, the pilots ate and drank up everything they had over the \$10,000 limit.

To add to the fun of alcohol bliss, the pilot's scrounged an old pilot's seat with cyclic from one of our damaged aircraft. Positioned in one corner of the tent, this pilot's seat was dubbed "The Hero's Chair." A flight helmet was gutted, leaving only the shell and boom mike, so that it would fit everyone. In old English letters, "Hero" was painted across the front of the helmet by Smokie AC, CWO Kjell "Troll" Tollefsen. When anyone was caught telling war stories, fabricating or stretching the truth about a previous mission, they would be called out by another pilot. Then the fun really began; they would be summoned to put on the "Hero's" helmet and sit in the "Hero's Chair" where they would tell their own story while holding on to the cyclic. The tent would become very quiet as the shit faced pilot's listened to the Hero telling his tale. Some pilot's had more stick time in the chair than others, but the newbies were usually the ones called out. It would be fair to say that every pilot who served with the Black Widows at LZ Sally saw stick time in the Hero's Chair.

Because the 188<sup>th</sup> was the only company in the 308<sup>th</sup> with a sundry fund, the EM and Officers' Club were well stocked with liquor, beer, and snacks. Needed supplies were often difficult to obtain through regular channels, so in exchange for a bottle of Scotch and a helicopter ride, the men in the 188<sup>th</sup> always got what they needed in northern I Corps.

## Thunderclap

Shortly after arriving at LZ Sally in early June, 1968, to the then 188<sup>th</sup> AHC, a young RLO 1LT Bob Faires, fresh from flight school, was introduced to the Black Widow **Thunderclap**. This introduction took place in the old Widow Web, the "officers' club" in a good ole GP medium tent with the crossed rotor blades at the entrance. Although I don't believe there is a specific recipe for this famous drink, to the best of my memory (and anyone who has chugged one of these concoctions certainly has a legitimate reason for poor memory) it starts off with a 12 oz beer can which has had the top cut out with a P-38 can opener (we didn't have glasses). Next, who ever happened to be tending bar then began pouring in an ounce or so of what ever booze was behind the bar . . . a little vodka, a little gin, rum, tequila, bourbon, etc. . . . until it was about two inches from the top, then it was topped off with beer! I was told all the new guys had to chug a Thunderclap to prove they were worthy of becoming a Black Widow. Fortunately, I was not going to have to take this test alone because also arriving about the same time was a big strong WO1 named Eric Pentilla (BW 44). (I believe Eric played football at University of Washington or Washington State University; I don't remember which.) I believe the bar tender that evening was RLO Frank Linster (BW 4). On this occasion, it not only became an initiation, but a contest; the RLO against the wobbly one! By the time this initiation was to take place, most of the guys were already half looped and began cheering their man . . . the WO's for the wobbly one, the RLO's for me. One of the RLO's shouted, "Come on Bob, show 'em how a real officer does it!" So, I proceeded to chug my Thunderclap and some how managed to get it

down without gagging! Eric was much smarter than I, and after a couple of small gulps, put his down to the dismay of all the crusty CWO's. The RLO's all cheered and someone said, "Hell, that's nothing, he can finish Eric's Thunderclap, too!" and shoved the rest of Eric's drink up to my face. Someone told me later I finished that one off, too . . . I don't remember. I was scheduled to fly Peter Pilot (PP) the next morning, I believe with WO Bill Crawford (BW 46). After waking me up the next morning, he kept telling me he could find someone else to fly with as I staggered out to the A/C. I kept saying I would be alright as soon as we got up in the air and I got some fresh air. He told me to buckle in the right seat while he completed the pre-flight. I really thought I was going to be OK, but when those old Huey blades started rotating and that cockpit seat started bouncing up and down, I had to make a quick exit to talk to Ralf down at the bottom of the skid! Needless to say, BW 46 had to call Op's and request a new PP. Looking back, I truly feel I was lucky I didn't die from alcohol poisoning. I think Doc Hanna gave me something that helped me live. I don't ever remember being sick for the rest of my tour . . . no germs in their right mind were about to invade my body! A couple of days later when I sobered up, I did receive counseling from BW 6, Major Henry Dreher, on the proper conduct of an officer. Ironically, a few months later he had to chug a mini Thunderclap of his own at his promotion party to get to that silver oak leaf at the bottom of the glass. Actually, it wasn't a Thunderclap (he outlawed those), it was a full glass of Drambuie, I believe. But, who in the world could believe a story like this? Anyone who drank one and a half **Thunderclaps** surely wouldn't have enough functioning brain cells to remember all this stuff!

When Major Hank Dreher became CO, he started using a 12 ounce A&W root beer mug, which he brought with him to the company, for promotions. The house would pour 12 ounces of the promotee's favorite liquor into the mug, then drop his new rank into the mug sending it to the bottom. He had to drink 12 ounces of liquor before he received his new rank. For those non-drinkers in the unit, 12 ounces of Coke would be used.

Another gimmick the pilots came up with was a hole cut into the side of the tent and a target painted around it using the hole as the bulls eye. After drinking a beer, they would try to throw the empty through the hole. As the evening progressed, there were more cans piling up on the inside of the club than the outside.

### **Dau Tieng Special Interest** **The Red Earth**

The Michelin Rubber Plantation was the largest of about twenty-five French rubber plantations that stretched in a three-hundred kilometer band from the South China Sea to the Mekong River in Cambodia. From before World War 1 the colonial government had allocated huge blocks of tropical rain forest to metropolitan corporations; from 1920 on, large amounts of capital became available to construct roads, nurture rubber seedlings, clear land and plant saplings.

The French rubber companies focused on recruiting contract laborers from the heavily populated Red River delta provinces far to the north. From a mere 3,022 contract laborers on southern rubber plantations in 1922, the number increased to 30,637 in 1930.

According to the contract, rubber workers would have their wages computed daily, would have living quarters provided, would have a clinic providing for free medical treatment and could purchase food at low plantation rates. At the end of the three year contract, they would be able to return to their home villages and the plantation owner would bear all expenses of their return journey. None of the above provisions were carried out, or if they were, they were not carried out fully. Workers did not even know what was in the written contract they signed. The tropical rain forests were in their natural state, never exploited by the hand of man. The rouge red soil was extremely fertile. There were many large companies in the rubber sector in southern Vietnam, such as the Compagnie des Terres Rouges, MIMOT, Michelin and the "Tropic Tree" Company.

As the plantation grew, hamlets were constructed to house the workers which would work that particular section of the vast plantation. Sanitary conditions were extremely poor and the living conditions were unbearable due to the oppressive heat and humidity.

In terms of organization, each hamlet was both a production unit and an administrative unit. When the siren sounded for work, groups often would form teams with a Vietnamese foreman watching each team. Above the foreman were the overseers, whom watched over several teams. They were generally half French. These overseers were in turn under the authority of a number of chief overseers. They were the ones who directed all operations. Each had their rights and privileges. Above them all was the manager. He was like the prince of the plantation. The manager's villa was off limits, like the private chambers of a king or a prince. No worker dared to come close. This entire crew, from manager to overseers was recruited from the French army.

Each person received a palm leaf hat, poncho, pruning hook, hoe and an axe. The overseers constantly inspected them and any time they saw one a bit dull or even with a hint of rust, it would be cause for a painful blow. Each person was issued a numbered piece of wood to hang around his neck like a prison number.

Every morning the workers had to get up at four o'clock to cook their food. At five-thirty they would form ranks in the hamlet courtyard so the overseers could check the roll. At times the overseers would use their batons, whacking the worker's heads as they counted them. If you were late, they would deduct it from your pay. After roll call, the overseers took the teams to the work area from six in the morning until six in the evening.

The workers had to toil steadily under the sun, hot as fire, except for fifteen minutes at noon to eat, drink, and relieve themselves. The overseers drove the workers without rest to fell trees, clear out underbrush, then dig holes to plant the rubber trees. They also had to endure the mosquitoes, ox-flies, and red army ants. Malaria and dysentery became chronic among the rubber workers. The workers were supposed to have Sunday off, but on that day they had to clean up around their housing area, including the barracks of the foremen and the private houses of the French overseers. It added up to five hours of unpaid work per person, so there was not one real day of rest in the whole year.

The overseers commonly beat workers who had just arrived in order to intimidate them. Workers were beaten to death, crushed



by falling trees, and were constantly intimidated. The women had to endure rape at the hands of the overseers. Those who tried to escape would be pursued and brought back to the hamlet where they were usually beaten unconscious and thrown into hot boxes and shackled for days at a time or shot to death and buried in rows of rubber trees. Later, their bodies would fertilize the latex-bearing rubber trees. Montagnards were hired to track those that escaped. They would cut off their heads, slice off their ears, and bring them back to the plantation for bounty. Others were taken to Bien Hoa and turned over to the secret police. They would be savagely tortured in an attempt to learn who the communist instigators were.

The new Communist party's objectives were to heighten class consciousness among plantation workers, to build an organization implicitly competing for power with the Michelin Company hierarchy, and to link local with regional and national struggles. The rubber plantations were perfect vehicles for proletarianizing workers to the communist ideals and revolution during this era. At the end of 1930, the rubber workers at Dau Tieng were mounting a large strike.

The government of South Vietnam had written off the area as communist controlled since the late 1920's. Who could blame these poor workers whose only alternative was communism at the time? Then we arrive in the area forty years later.

Source: The Red Earth, a Vietnamese memoir of life on a colonial rubber plantation, by Tran Tu Binh. Translated by John Spragens, Jr., Ohio University. Edited by David G. Marr. Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series, No. 66.

## French Foreign Legion

I served in Vietnam from 1949 - 1952 (34 months) with the 13<sup>th</sup> DBLE (Demi Brigade legion Etrangere) in Hoc Mon, Tay Ninh, and from 1951 - 52 in Dau Tieng. We were there to protect the Michelin Plantation and the workers from the communist Viet Minh. At that time there were 22 small hamlets within the plantation where the workers lived. We were located across from an old Catholic church in Ap Nam, close to a small hospital. I'll never forget how a Lieutenant from the SPAHI's detachment saved my life by passing our convoy on Highway 239 from Dau Tieng to Tay Ninh in his jeep. The road had already been swept by mine detectors. Suddenly, right in front of us, his jeep hit a mine buried under the soil and all that was left of the jeep was the four wheels. Later we discovered that the Viet Minh were wrapping their mines in paraffin (wax used in candles). Using this method, the mines were never detected and caused big problems for the convoys.

There were a large number of German soldiers who signed up for the Legion instead of starving to death in French POW camps after the end of World War II. Even though French was the official language of the Legion, there was plenty of German spoken in the ranks during our time in Vietnam.

The 13<sup>th</sup> DBLE Regiment pulled out of Dau Tieng in late 1952 and relocated to Tonkin. They were replaced by the Regular French Army. After the French defeat at Dien Ben Phu, the army left in late 1954.

In his last letter to Wladimir, an old Vietnamese Padre, Le Vinh Kuong, who presided at the old Catholic church wrote, "Only God knows what will happen now." They had become friends during Wladimir's tour and had kept in touch.

Source: Letter written by Wladimir A. Koudelka, French Foreign Legion, Veteran's Home in Castaic, CA (72 years of age).

## Dau Tieng

In 1965, Lloyd was an E-7 Sergeant First Class MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) Advisor assigned to Advisory Team 91 in the village of Dau Tieng from 10 October 1965 - 6 October 1966. He was the operations and intelligence advisor to the local Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF). The mission of the team was to support the effort to supply and train the local Vietnamese and to specifically enhance the Rural Pacification program, the Chieu Hoi program, and provide intelligence to the main ARVN Headquarters.

The mission of the advisory team was to assist the RF and PF forces in the defense of their hamlets to which they were assigned to defend, to accompany regular ARVN units on search and destroy operations in the Michelin and Ben Cui I, II, III rubber plantations, and the relocation of friendly Vietnamese from Viet Cong controlled areas. The PF forces were responsible for the manning of outposts within the hamlets and to provide an early warning of enemy action. The Dau Tieng — Tri Tam District headquarters was responsible for the overall defense of the five hamlets which comprises Dau Tieng. There were 32 hamlets in the Michelin Rubber Plantation of which only five were controlled by the government of South Vietnam. The Phu Loi Battalion, several VC regiments, and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) units were active in the area.

A typical day of an advisor consisted of advising his Vietnamese counterpart of pending projects and the enemy situation and actions from the last 24 hours. We were also responsible for the overall defensive materials, ammo, barrier material, night interdiction fire, MEDCAP Teams, and aerial observation reconnaissance flights needed to defend the hamlets. Offensive operations were conducted to take control of the hamlets. A RF and PF platoon consisted of Headquarters Section and three rifle squads.

Headquarters Section		Rifle Squad		Weapons	
Platoon Leader, E-8	1	Squad Leader, E-6	1	Carbine, M-1	17
Platoon Sergeant/Psychological Warfare NCO, E-7	1	Fire Team Leader, E-5	1	Carbine, M-2	9
RTO, E-4	2	Automatic Rifle, E-2	1	BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle)	3
AIDMAN, E-4	1	Assistant Automatic Rifle, E-2	1	Rifle, M-1	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	AMMO Men, E-2	2	Grenade Launcher Rifle, M-79	3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	Binocular 6 x 30	1
				Flashlight TL 122	5
				Radio, PRC 10	2
				Antenna, 292	1
				Medical Bag	1
				Aluminum Litter	1

Our largest problem was the logistics nightmare of maintaining enough ammo to conduct combat operations plus POL (Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants) products and defensive materials. Items included:

81 mm and 60 mm mortar ammo

Gas and oil for vehicles

Claymore mines/trip flares for the outposts

Magazines for the M-1 and M-2 carbines

45 caliber submachine gun magazines (BAR)

Cement, corrugated steel roofing material, lime

Outposts were in disarray and needed to be relocated and built to withstand an attack by the Viet Cong and NVA. In this regard, barrier material was at a premium. A typical ammo requisition was:

100 cases of HE (high explosive) ammo - 81 mm and 60 mm mortars

112 cases of illuminating ammo - 81 mm and 60 mm mortars

15 cases of WP (white phosphorus) ammo - 81 mm and 60 mm mortars

38 cases of Claymore mines

7 cases of fragmentation grenades

3 ½ cases of trip flares

13 cases of smoke grenades

12 cases of M-79 - 40 mm ammo

1 case of C4 plastic explosive

½ case of concussion grenades with strikers

21 LAWS rockets

Communication checks were conducted four times a day: 0745 hours, 1145 hours, 1645 hours, and 2215 hours.

On 22 November 1965 at 0345 hours in hamlet 13B, elements of the 7<sup>th</sup> ARVN Regiment and attached units came under heavy mortar, grenade, and automatic weapons fire. The Viet Cong penetrated the southeast corner of hamlet 13B and the ARVN company securing the southeast end of the perimeter was forced to withdraw along with the district RF and PF forces.

At 0500 hours, the District Chief employed the PF's and we were forced to withdraw thirty meters to the next house through a banana tree grove. Air strikes and direct artillery fire was delivered on the Viet Cong and the hooches they had taken over in the hamlet. The enemy fire was so intense that the Intelligence Squad with the District Chief suffered 4 KIA and 5 WIA. At 0710 hours the PF's and the remainder of the ARVN 1<sup>st</sup> battalion 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment retook the hooches in the southeast corner of the hamlet 13 B and recaptured two M-60 machine guns and all ammunition. After the smoke had cleared, the enemy had lost 100 KIA by body count. Losses sustained by the ARVN 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment and PF Intelligence Squad was 4 KIA and 72 WIA. This included one US advisor assigned to the artillery battery.

On 23 November 1965, the Viet Cong once again probed the west and southeast corners of hamlet 13B. Mortar and small arms fire were received, contact was made and broken at 0010 hours resulting in 1 KIA and 12 WIA along with an unknown number of Viet Cong.

Operations were conducted in Ben Cui I, II, and III in February and March of 1966. The village of Ben Cui, which was directly across the Saigon River from Dau Tieng, was totally destroyed and the entire village relocated. Unit actions were conducted on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> of February resulting in some casualties caused by small arms fire.

On 27 November 1965, the so-called Thanksgiving Day Massacre took place at hamlet 6B. The 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 5<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division was mauled in the Michelin Rubber Plantation. Advisory Team 70 (Phu Loi) lost three advisory teams, including the Regimental Advisory Team. The battle was the worst ARVN defeat up until that time of the conflict. Ten advisors were KIA and numerous WIA were evacuated from the battle scene. The 1/7 Advisors were the only survivors from the Thanksgiving Day Massacre.

In April of 1966, the District Chief and PF's conducted a search and destroy operation in the village of Ben Suc (Iron Triangle) and attempted to relocate the civilian population from Ben Suc. It was not successful.

During this period, numerous operations were conducted by the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, ARVN 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade, 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry brigade, and the 199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry

Brigade. The airfield at Dau Tieng was used as a Fire Support Base for units operating in the area. The Michelin Rubber Plantation during 1965 and 1966 was the baptism of fire for a number of US Army Units.

The advisory team at Dau Tieng had numerous acts of violence to contend with. Viet Cong terrorism included kidnaping, assassination, the bobby trapping of berry bushes and areas frequented by civilians. The South Vietnamese Government Information Service Headquarters was also blown up.

The officers and men of the Advisory Team 91 at Dau Tieng District Headquarters were, for the most part, isolated and during 1965 and 1966 had to face all kinds of obstacles. For the most part, we did accomplish our mission of retaking control of the hamlets in the Michelin Rubber Plantation. With the influx of Regular Army units in late 1965 and 1966, US units took control of combat operations in conjunction with the 5<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN Divisions in the III Corps Area of Operations (AO).

During the time Lloyd was there, the Viet Cong controlled most of the hamlets by night and we controlled them by day. When we departed, the Viet Cong would move into the hamlets at night. They would extract taxes, food, and intelligence from the locals. He was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Bronze Star for his actions in hamlet 13B. Other advisors were also decorated for bravery.

Source: Sergeant Major Lloyd J. Rahlf, USA (Retired)

### **Historical Summary of the Dau Tieng Plantation**

A brief summary of the history of the Michelin Rubber Plantation was prepared in January, 1967 for the staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The summary which follows was translated from the original report, written in French, by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Christian Provensome, a 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Intelligence Officer.

#### **Year of Creation: 1925**

**At first, the entire Dau Tieng area was a dense jungle with wild animals that roamed around. In 1930, some of these savage animals were in the areas now occupied by Brigade buildings.**

Total plantation area	9260 hectares
Planted area (reported area plus areas of new trees)	7000 hectares
Area which existed before October, 1965	4800 hectares
Area currently reported	2900 hectares
<b>Monthly production for the month of December:</b>	
1962	844 metric tons
1963	836 metric tons
1964	792 metric tons
1965	63 metric tons (suspension of work following military operations)
1966	454 metric tons
<b>Number of workers:</b>	
1965	3800
Before October, 1965	3500
Currently reported	1600

After 1945, the runway was built by the Michelin Society for its three liaison aircraft. The hospital was built in 1927 with 300 beds.

### **Michelin**

The Plantation belongs to the Michelin Society of Plantations and pneumatics of Vietnam which is part of the International Group of Michelin. This Society also owns the Thuan Loi (Phoug Long) Plantation and a pneumatic fabrication factory in Saigon. The activity of the Plantation in Tuan Loi has been suspended because the center was destroyed by aerial bombing during the Battle of Dong Xoai in June, 1965. When both the Dau Tieng and Thuan Loi Plantations were in normal activity production, the Society employed about 5000 workers and the annual production was 10,000 metric tons of dry rubber.

Source: National Archives, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Intelligence

### **Fort Nisqually**

The first tactical operation of 1967 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was Operation Fort Nisqually which actually began on 28 November 1966 and ended on 14 May 1967. Under the command of Colonel Marshall B. Garth, the mission of the brigade was to

displace from Bear Cat (Camp Cox) and establish a base camp at Dau Tieng, RVN, and conduct operations in its assigned Tactical Area of Responsibility. The move was accomplished by motor march and airlift. Operations in the Brigade Tactical Area of Responsibility were successful in establishing U.S. influence in an area in which the Viet Cong had habitually used as a sanctuary for resupply, re-equipping, and staging area for operations as lines of communication were interdicted. By 20 February 1967, the brigade had completed all movement and had completed essential defenses. The "Funky Fourth" named their new base camp "Camp Rainier." The decision was easy to make since the Division had been based at Ft. Lewis, Washington in full view of beautiful Mt. Rainier. The Brigade was redesignated as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on 1 August 1967. Prior to that, the Brigade was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry division, but operated under the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The redesignation simplified command structures and other problems inherent while operating under one command while assigned to another. In other words, both brigades switched patches which resulted in low morale for both groups involved.

The Michelin Rubber Processing village of Dinh Tranh (Dau Tieng) was located on the muddy, winding Saigon River 40 miles northwest of Saigon in the Tri Tam District of Binh Duong Province. The 188<sup>th</sup> was located in the southwest corner of the camp just a stone's throw from the village. Numerous tunnels were being dug during the unit's tenure. During a Viet Cong mortar attack in November of 1967, one of the tunnels collapsed well inside our perimeter. These tunnels would be used later in the war to gain access to the base camp. Sniper fire was a very real problem from the village, so much so that First Sergeant Ramon DePalm, Sr. (a.k.a.: Big Cambodia) rarely called company formations. Needless to say, the village was off limits. Partially built within the Michelin Rubber Plantation, we were fortunate to have the shade of those rubber trees. A truly beautiful area of lush, triple canopy jungle, rice paddies, and a magnificent view of Nui Ba Den off to the west. The previous tenants, elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division, left beau-coup mine fields in place. The engineers spent a lot of time and effort removing these minefields.

Source: Historical Summary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for 1967, National Archives

### **"White Warriors" Engaged in Sustained Operations**

Dau Tieng — The "White Warriors" (1) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry have been participating in sustained operations since their arrival in the combat zone. In early November the battalion, then commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Marvin D. Fuller, was sent from Camp Martin Cox to Phuoc Vinh to provide security for elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division participating in Operation Attleboro. However, because of the tactical situation, the "Warriors" were involved in more than "security" duty. They were used on several operations and numerous patrols and saw scattered action. On November 20, with Lieutenant Colonel Joe F. Elliott as their commander, the "Warriors" began packing for their move to Camp Rainier at Dau Tieng, the sight of the Michelin Rubber Plantation. Their mission, to build a permanent base camp for American forces, was completed with the refurbishing of an 80-foot-long swimming pool which was built by the French. A surprisingly large number of volunteer plumbers, electricians, painters, and laborers showed once again the versatility of the battalion. The "Warriors" have participated in several operations since their arrival at Dau Tieng. The first task the battalion faced was searching and clearing the surrounding villages throughout the plantation.

In a sweep of nearly 45,000 meters, several well-fortified enemy base camps were discovered and destroyed. Although some of the enemy were able to flee the area, they were forced to leave both supplies and food behind. The six-day operation netted seven Viet Cong killed and six detained. The "Warriors" initiated month-long Operation Ponders Corners December 12 and made contact with the enemy several times, killing 16 Viet Cong. Several bags of confidential documents, numerous weapons, medical supplies, and 58 tons of rice were captured.

In early January, reacting to intelligence concerning Viet Cong in the village of Thanh An, the "Warriors," in conjunction with elements of the Republic of Vietnam national Police and Popular Forces, were airlifted into a position encircling the village. All rifle companies were immediately engaged from the surrounding area. After artillery and air strikes, the battalion's Reconnaissance platoon, together with Republic of Vietnam troops, began searching the village. The 2/12th's civic affairs section quickly set up a collection point and site for a MEDCAP. After the villagers were fed and entertained, they were informed of the reason for the operation, the objectives of the South Vietnamese Government and how it would affect them. Later events attest to the impression the battalion made on the villagers of Thanh An. Approximately 300 villagers left the hamlet for a village under government control and seven men turned themselves in as Hoi Chahn.

**Footnote (1)** The White Warriors totem pole, shipped from Fort Lewis, Washington, stands in front of the Headquarters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry at the Dau Tieng base camp of the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The pole represents each war in which the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry has participated. Commander of Third Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Colonel Marshall B. Garth. Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry, LTC Joe Elliot.

Source: 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division IVY LEAF, April 28, 1967.

### **Would You Believe? This in War Zone C?**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division recently added its splash to one of man's most unusual wars when it resurrected a stately 1930 French swimming pool at Dau Tieng just a short distance from Viet Cong rifle fire. In a scene that would undoubtedly send Lloyd Bridges under for the third time, the combat-hardened 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade troops have taken the new swimming pool almost as calmly as a Viet Cong mortar attack.

"It's unbelievable!" said one Specialist. "I haven't had this much fun since I left the States. About the only thing we don't have are girls." And few would dispute that this was the greatest morale booster to hit the camp since Armed Forces Television brought "Batman" to the country late last year. When the Ivy men arrived in War Zone C, it didn't take them long to uncover and overrun the dilapidated swimming pool, originally built under the shade of the Michelin Rubber Plantation, built by the French in the 1930's.

The pool was marred by 20 years of neglect and war (the pipe system was beyond use, debris contaminated the bottom, a grenade explosion had ripped out a chunk of cement), but the potential was definitely there.

The (1) 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry "White Warriors," getting a chance to show its versatility, moved in, cleaned up, then moved out. Not before installing 10 showers below the sun deck, dumping 80 gallons of paint on the swimming pool's walls, and 275,000 gallons of water to fill the tank. The result was a fabulous 81-foot-long, 31-foot-wide, 12-foot-deep pool and an opening day splash-in that resembled a school of salmon in a goldfish bowl.

Since the opening day, the pool has taken on a few additions and now features a little something for almost everyone. The high divers have a four-meter tower, while a spring board constructed at pool level from a helicopter rotor-blade has been installed for the less daring. A wading pool tapering down to four feet accommodates those just wanting to relax and forget the bitter turmoil in War Zone C. The sun deck is equipped with a stereo unit, and management has available masks, swim-fins, and snorkels. The pool is managed by SP/5 Ray Croft. He is responsible for the care and maintenance of the pool and equipment, and pool safety. He is assisted by SP/4 Jim Fulton, and Cpl. Ron McAtee. In addition to their other duties, the pool crew gives daily swimming classes for the non-swimmers in the brigade. The pool is open daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., but no one yet has suggested putting up night lights for a midnight's swim. That might be just too much!

The 188<sup>th</sup> made good use of this pool since it was close to our company area. The security platoon who manned the defensive perimeter all night was able to take advantage of the pool during the day. Flight crews who weren't flying or on detail also took advantage of the pool. There were two other swimming pools located across the road at the Michelin Manager's Villa. One was for his private use while visiting the plantation and the other was used by Officers and Warrant officers only. The Olympic size pool also had a playboy bunny painted on the bottom. It made the war a little easier to deal with when you could cool off in the midst of such unbearable heat and humidity. To achieve pride in their unit, each member of the battalion has the head of an Indian warrior painted on the side of his camouflage helmet cover and the butt of his M-16 weapon. A different color distinguished on company from another. Headquarters - black, Company A - red, Company B - green, and Company C - blue.

Source: Pacific Stars and Stripes, July, 1967

### **Ivy's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's Snack Bar First and Only in War Zone C**

Dau Tieng — A 155 mm artillery shell destroyed the silence of the base camp as the round headed for suspected Viet Cong positions in rugged War Zone C.

"Gimme' a hamburger!"

"Commin' right up."

"An a shake too!"

"Chocolate or vanilla?"

Outside the perimeter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Famous Fourth), a war of cat and mouse rages, but inside the Ivy Command a new and welcomed addition has made life a little more pleasurable: a genuine "off any Stateside street" Snack Bar — the first and only in War Zone C. Staffed with five Vietnamese girls and three Ivy Troopers, the newest development of the Michelin Rubber Plantation base camp can "feed an army." Stocked with some 8,000 hamburgers and 8,000 hot dogs, the snack bar serves golden brown fries, shakes, home-type chili, and juice drinks. The enlisted men keeping the burgers sizzling and the shakes shaking are all from infantry units. Each man has been wounded at least once in enemy action. Specialist 4 Carl A. Lammers (Breese, Ill.) is the head cook. Specialist 4 James W. Spears (Coeur d'Alene, Idaho) and Specialist 4 James F. Shaw (Baltimore, MD) help keep the establishment in order. All three men have civilian experience in the short order field.

On the opening day — set purposely to help celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July — the staff found themselves busy broiling 702 hamburgers, pouring 1,000 cold drinks, shaking 500 malts and making 100 sandwiches. Most of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division units were still in the field looking for Charlie. Future plans include a Japanese pagoda-type patio nestled under numerous shade trees and Vietnamese contractors will lend a local touch in the development program. After a good hamburger with everything, and a cold drink, each Ivyman has only to make an about face, take about 30 steps, and go for a swim in the Brigades' refurbished pool.

You have to understand that Camp Rainier was very isolated and the last stop for any convoy out of Saigon. First stop was Cu Chi, second stop Tay Ninh, and we got what was left. Fresh produce was ruined by the time it arrived after the 140 mile drive during the 100+ degree heat of the day. I'm sure our sister units (116<sup>th</sup> and 187<sup>th</sup>) were eating better than the 188<sup>th</sup>. The cooks did their best, but if you had any money you headed for the snack bar. We were fortunate to have the pool snack bar complex so close to our company area. The entire base was fortunate to have such a unique set-up within a base camp let alone within a very hot V.C. controlled area. To the best of my knowledge, the V.C. never targeted the pool and snack bar. They liked our Huey's the most. To compensate for the situation we were forced to deal with, our closest bird to Saigon (Hotel 3) at the end of the day would pick up fresh meat and produce and ferry it to our company. One of the pleasures of being an aviation unit.

Source: Ivy Leaf, Vol. 1, No. 37, July 23, 1967. By SP/4 Gary M. Silva.



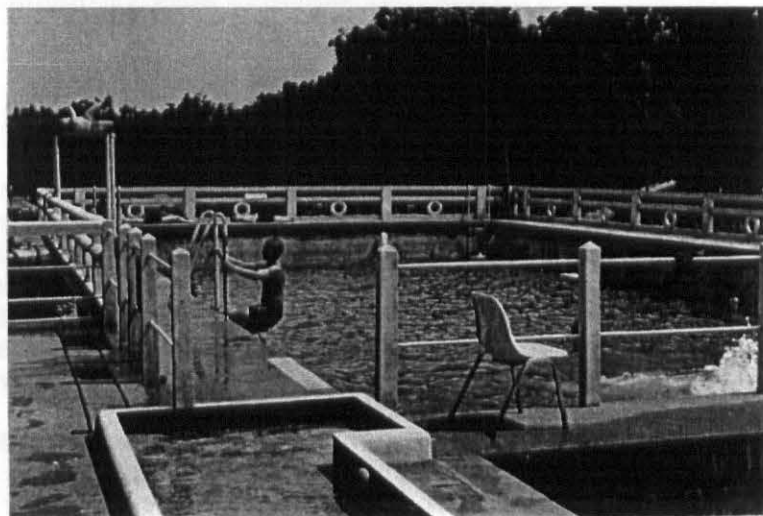
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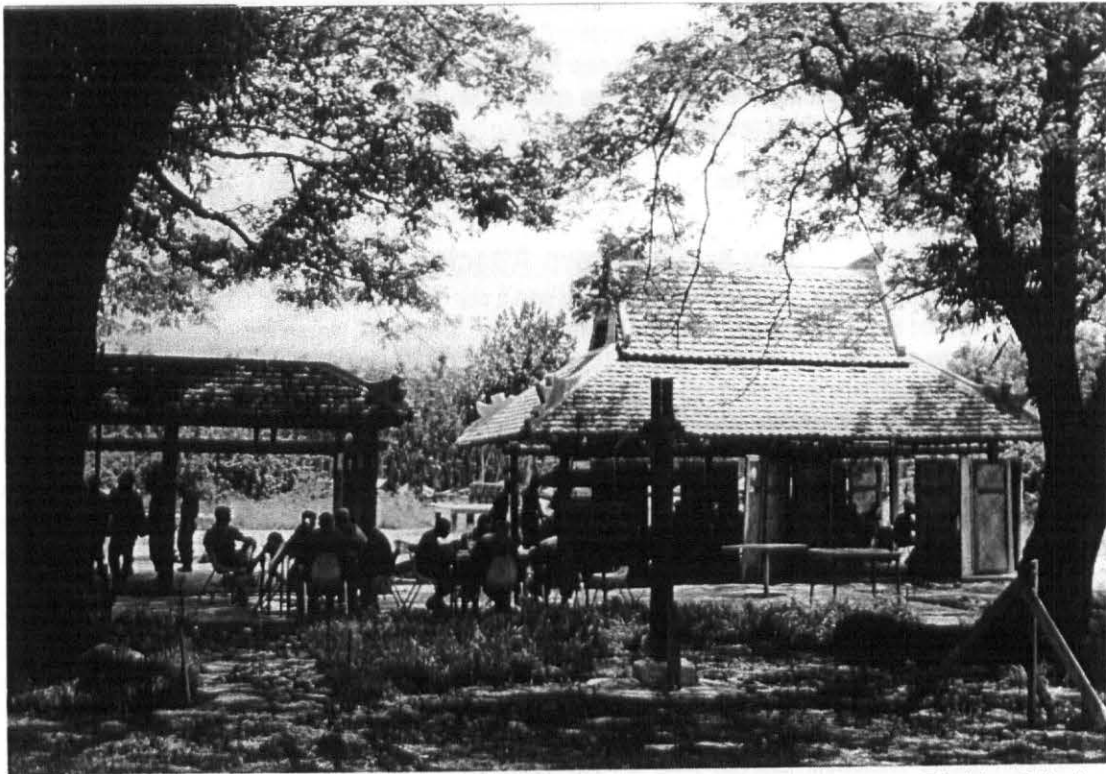
Dick Detra Collection



Ron Merlock Collection



Ron Merlock Collection

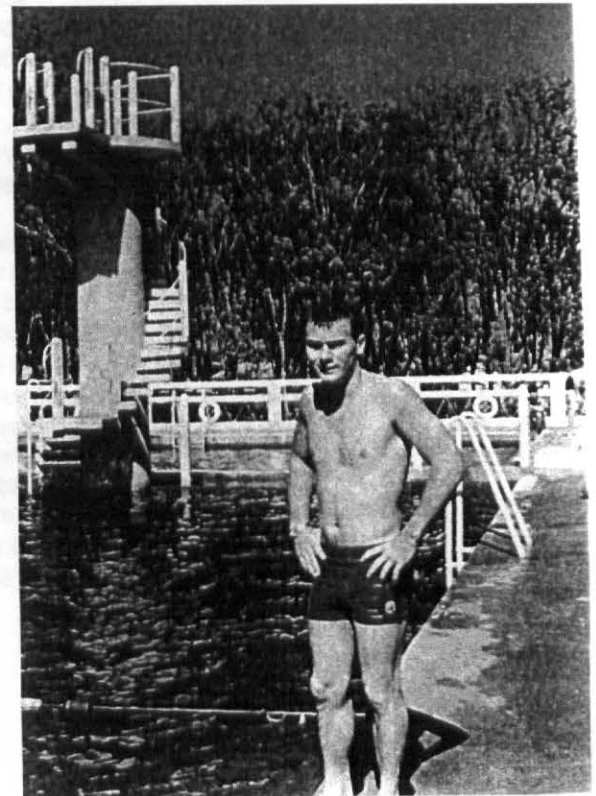


Ed Atlee Collection

SNACK BAR OPENED JULY 4, 1967



Ed Atlee Collection



Ron Merlock Collection

## **GI's Halt Red Suicide Wave**

Saigon, July 4, 1968 — U.S. Infantrymen manning a base camp northwest of Saigon got more than their share of Fourth of July fireworks today as Communists unleashed 500 mortar and rocket rounds, then opened a ground attack. The two and a half hour assault took place at the U.S. Third Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division base camp at Dau Tieng, 40 miles northwest of Saigon. United States armed helicopters, artillery, and Air Force gunships helped drive back the charging Communists. Only five of the enemy reached the American bunker line, but failed to pierce the perimeter. An initial count showed nine Reds dead, with three Americans killed and 50 wounded. Later, U.S. 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division soldiers probing an infiltration corridor ten miles south of Dau Tieng, uncovered a booby trapped bunker with 35 Russian-made rockets and more than 1,000 rounds of smaller bazooka shells.

Source: July, 1968 Stars and Stripes Newspaper, by Joseph Fried

## **July 4<sup>th</sup> Pre-Dawn Attacks**

Dau Tieng, (25<sup>th</sup> INF-10) — More than 400 enemy rocket and mortar rounds and a pair of pre-dawn ground attacks by two reinforced Viet Cong companies were recently repelled by 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division soldiers. The attack, largest sustained in the two-year history of Dau Tieng base camp, was broken by gunships and infantry. At least 10 enemy soldiers were left dead on the perimeter of the camp. The attack began shortly before 2:30 a.m. as salvo after salvo of mortar fire struck all corners of the base camp. Miraculously, no one was killed as an official total of 374 mortars, eight 107 mm rockets, and 25 rocket grenade rounds slammed around infantrymen who were huddled in defensive bunkers. Striking from both sides of the perimeter north of the airfield, the Viet Cong attempted a pincer movement which hit night defensive positions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 77<sup>th</sup> Artillery and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. Several artillery bunkers were damaged as the enemy suicide squad hitting the west side of the camp struck with rocket grenades and satchel charges. At least seven VC broke inside the perimeter before the attack was halted. On the east side of the camp, a larger VC force emerged from behind tombstones in a cemetery but were cut down by machine gun and duster fire. Two VC planted themselves near the end of the runway and tossed pressure-released satchel charges onto the east end of the airstrip. As gunships entered the fight, the ground attacks were completely disrupted. By the light of flares, enemy soldiers were seen to toss their weapons to the ground and run for the protective cover of nearby woods. Before dawn, Puff the Magic Dragon gunships began circling the base camp, dropping flares and adding more firepower to the assault on the retreating enemy. Artillery fire and more gunship raids also hit the VC. A preliminary search of the perimeter the following morning recovered, in addition to the enemy bodies, 434 home-made satchel charges; 3 bangalore torpedoes; 62 grenade rounds, both RPG-2 and RPG-7; 45, 60 mm mortar rounds; a grenade launcher; numerous hand grenades; and 6 assault rifles. Later in the day, Vietnamese and U.S. troops found a large cache of ammunition and demolitions, similar to those used in the attack, stored in a nearby village.

Source: Stars & Stripes, July 4, 1968

## **Independence Day 1968**

Five months after the Black Widows had relocated to LZ Sally and most of the Camp Rainier troops were out on operations, the VC hit the base camp and gained entry through an artillery position on the west end of the airfield. The two pronged attack hit both ends of the airfield. After killing a number of guards asleep on the bunker line, the VC entered the base camp headed for the aircraft. Bee hive rounds were used to decimate the advancing sappers. The east side of the perimeter was rocked by the detonation of satchel charges being thrown over the wire. The air field was swept by elements of the 2/22 (Triple Deuce) Infantry, plugging the penetration and evacuating the wounded. Large numbers of enemy dead were killed in the wire. Later, two trucks loaded with satchel charges was found in the rubber trees of the Michelin Plantation.

Source: Bob Price, 3/22 Regulars. LTC Bob "Bravo Bull" Hemphill, C.O. B/3/22, Received nickname during mortar attack on Dau Tieng, October 8, 1967

On July 4, 1968, "B" Company was saddling up and being transported by truck to their night ambush on the main road leading into Camp Rainier. They were only going out 12 clicks and were going to be dropped off and would walk in the next day. My 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant came up to me and said that since I was a short timer, I could kick back and be Sergeant of the guard and just check the night perimeter bunkers. I know I was a really happy camper. At whatever time it was that night and when the rockets and mortars started raining in all over the base camp, I was thinking to myself that, "I wished I were out on ambush." In the morning, we went to the airfield area and there were dead V.C. all over the place, in the wire, every where carrying satchel charges. Most units were out in the field . . . Charlie's favorite time to attack.

Source: Sergeant Mac Seay, "B" Company 2/12 White Warriors (Bad-Ass Bravo) — letter

The 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division shared our area of operations and was considered the worst ARVN Division in Vietnam. The Division Commander was a high ranking Communist mole, so most operations never made contact. The enemy units were long gone when we arrived. In 1969, this same Commander was arrested, interrogated, and incarcerated in a POW camp. The new commander was very disciplined and the gung-ho type. In a short period of time, he turned the Division into one of the three best besides the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division and the 9<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division.

Source: LTC Bob Hemphill, B/3/22 Commanding Officer

## 195<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company

From May through August, 1968, the "Skychiefs" and "Thunderchickens" of the 195<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company set up shop at Dau Tieng in support of Project SIGMA, a classified MACV-SOG operation. They used the same revetments built by the 188<sup>th</sup> during this cross border operation into Cambodia.

### Stacked Deck

In September 1968, six months after the departure of the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company Black Widows, the advanced party of the 229<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division arrived at Dau Tieng. The Stacked Deck Battalion consisted of:

Headquarters and Headquarters Company (Stacked Deck)

Alpha Company (Black Bandit) slicks — logo was a racoon with a mask

Bravo Company (Killer Spade) slicks

Charlie Company (North Flag) slicks

Delta Company (Smiling Tiger) Cobra gunships — logo was Walt Disney's own smiling tiger character

Headquarters and Headquarters Company along with Bravo Company set up shop on the northwest end of the down sized Camp Rainier Base Camp. The Army learned a big lesson from the location of the 188<sup>th</sup> Company area and airstrip, which was across the road from the VC controlled village of Dau Tieng. A short time later, HHC relocated to Tay Ninh to join up with Alpha and Charlie Company. Replacing HHC at Camp Rainier was Delta Companies, Smiling Tigers. At some point during this time frame, the "Centaur's" of D Company 3/4 CAV had choppers stationed near the main runway. During the fall of 1970, with the withdrawal of American units from Vietnam, there was a tactical consolidation of forces back towards Bien Hoa. The 229<sup>th</sup> was the last major aviation unit to be stationed at Dau Tieng and was relocated to Phu Loi.

Dau Tieng was one of the most isolated base camps in Vietnam, and was a very dangerous place. The village had always been off limits to United States servicemen. Future air support for the Dau Tieng Area of Operation would come from aviation units stationed closer to the Saigon/Bien Hoa/Long Binh area.

### The Battle of the Dau Tieng Base Camp

One 23 February 1969, at 0035 hours, the Dau Tieng Base Camp was attacked by a reinforced NVA Battalion. The ground attack was preceded by 60 mm, 82 mm and 120 mm mortar fire, and several 107 mm rockets. The initial probe was against the southeast and northwest portions of the perimeter with heavy volumes of small arms and automatic weapons fire as well as RPG fire. At 0058 hours, the southern portion of the perimeter also came under heavy attack. Through out this period, the enemy continued to employ a heavy volume of indirect fire, primarily on the air strip and the east side of the camp. The enemy penetrated the base camp's eastern perimeter at about 0100 hours. Approximately 15 - 20 VC made their way into the 1/27 Artillery motor pool while 10 more entered the 2/77 Artillery motor pool and the aircraft revetments. The enemy penetrated the bunker line of the southern sector at 0170 hours by cutting the wire and crawling under the wire. Enemy forces within the base camp were isolated and eliminated by the employment of reaction forces. Defending forces of Dau Tieng Base Camp forced the enemy to withdraw at about 0400 hours toward the Michelin Plantation and to the south toward the Trapezoid. Sporadic RPG and sniper fire continued until 1000 hours. Even though the enemy was able to destroy or damage several aircraft on the air strip, he suffered extensive casualties. Enemy losses were 76 KIA, 14 POW's, 50 possible KIA, plus the loss of weapons and equipment. Base Camp forces suffered 18 KIA and 74 WIA on this operation.

Source: Operational Report, headquarters, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Quarterly Report, 1 February to 31 March 1969 — National Archives

### The Battle of Dau Tieng

Finally it was morning and the weak rays of sunlight were chasing the night's shadows from the berm line road. The sun shone through the even-spaced rubber trees behind the bunker line reaching the soil in spots, and a light breeze sometimes rustled the placid foliage. Now the corpses lay scattered in fleeting shadows brushed by the glimmering light. They lay as they had fallen the night before already frozen by death. They'd breached the wire, blown the bunker, and hurried to cross the road to enter the trees. The stillness was receding with the shadows as Bill Noyes stood above the enemy sappers, looking at a dead American. He and his comrades were survivors of the garish night, caught in transition to a bustling new day.

"We were the twenty-three members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon. Part of the mechanized reaction force for the base camp at Dau Tieng, we had been separated from Bravo Company early in the long night. At the start of the NVA's assault, we had waited in the 2/22nd Battalion area several miles away at the opposite end of the base camp. In cautious starts, we made our way down black streets, across the airstrip, and into the area of the camp that the enemy had overrun. Our three trucks had rumbled behind us as we felt our way without rifle muzzles through the darkness, not knowing either the area or where the enemy might be."

The battle started with a sudden mortar barrage. Noyes listened to the firing and the rockets landing at the opposite side of the base. The sector seemed strangely quiet. Not noticing much activity in the floating flare light there, the troopers worried that their bunker line that was about 100 yards behind was poorly manned. Because of the standby orders, the trucks idled on the open road to the front of them as the soldiers readied their equipment. They watched the tracers fly from the far end of the darkened base camp into the sky and into the tree line of the Michelin Rubber Plantation which was barely visible beneath artillery flares.

The battle seemed a distant, picturesque spectacle until they heard the soft, slow slicing of mortar rounds falling through the night

air. The barrage landed rhythmic crashes along the roadway; not far away, the bursts methodically stepped toward the tracks. "Fragments cut the air and landed with thuds as we scattered and scrambled into hiding. Then only a dust cloud was left to merge with the night. No one hurt, the immediate danger vanished with the sound. We were part of the battle now. More anxious to be moving than before," Bill Noyes recalls. And the word soon came: "Move Out!" As they rode the rumbling tracks down the dirt road toward the airstrip, the relay of talk from the platoon leader's track said they were going to outpost some artillery. The mission somehow changed as they approached the dark airfield. "We were to cross the airstrip, but the question was, how?" In the darkness the airstrip was an unknown obstacle — a solid, black "Kill-Zone" to be breached. A whispered conference was held at the lead track: "Exactly how and by whom?" That there was danger, it was agreed. They knew some enemy were past the bunker line and into the base. Two surveillance and reconnaissance planes from the 19<sup>th</sup> Tactical Air Support Squadron had been destroyed on the runway. Their fear had thoroughly mixed with the blackness before them when Bill Noyes and two other troopers — all veteran infantrymen — began a determined rush across the void.

"Our magazines tugged at the straps across our shoulders and around our waists with each running step. Their wait was felt in the knees, and the hardness of the ground at each pounding footfall. Their slap and rattle, a throbbing heartbeat in each ear, were the dominant sounds of this quiet reckoning to the crossing. Behind us, more footsteps started; ahead, there was only silence." The ditch along the opposite edge of the east-west runway took slow form at their approach. "The night was now warm with sweat. Then we were at the ditch's edge, blackness inside, darkness surrounding it. Crumb was the first man in, almost disappearing. We followed. All waited, crouching, as the shadows around us loomed larger and the track engines surged in the darkness beyond." As the platoon collected, they discovered two frightened figures further down the ditch, one slightly wounded. They'd met the sappers earlier and they told their story excitedly to the four or five troopers who'd just arrived. They felt lucky to be alive and glad at this friendly meeting in the dark of night. The visit lasted only a short while before the platoon resumed its push into the unknown, gingerly probing past vacant bunkers and buildings, a blind march to the Wolfhound sector of the bunker line.

At some black spot in the darkness, the Lieutenant turned them to the left and, shortly, they broke from total darkness into a scene of weird, shimmering shadows and the chaos of a battle that seemed nearly ended. Bill Noyes and his platoon found themselves at the bunker line where the Wolfhounds had been overrun by sappers. "In the rocking flare light, the men's wild, frenzied eyes glinted and shone with the tension of the night's battle. Their exhaustion gave way to obvious gladness at our arrival, as our tracks drove on line between the bunkers. We could see no enemy fire from the shadows in front of us as we dismounted and readied for firing. The Wolfhounds pointed with vehemence to where the enemy had been in the dark. The tangle of shadows and concertina wire awaited our attack."

The trooper's .50 caliber fire erupted, mixed with rifles, machine guns, and grenades, and with the cheers of the Wolfhounds. "We raked the ground, our tracers bounding into the blackness, darting between each wire post. After the firing, the boisterous yells and cheers faded more slowly. The tracks roared while backing off the bunker line and we turned to leave this eerie, junk-strewn place. Some Wolfhounds bid us a clenched fist and peace sign good-bye, their calls showing their spirits had been raised. Quickly, we were back in the enveloping darkness." Mounted high on the tracks, scanning each black opening or crevice in the darkness below with weapons ready, they rode in slow progress through the night. They clanked along a mysterious road and roared onto the airstrip again at its lower end, then followed the gently rising strip along the familiar ditch until they reached the middle of the runway. Here they stopped and waited, the camp hushed all around them.

From the idling tracks, they could see the dawn sky graying above the distant plantation tree line. Across the airstrip were the dark, blasted hulks of the aircraft the sappers had destroyed. A single body lay crumpled on the ground. Some in the platoon had dismounted and attempted to sleep, their weapons close. The tracks shut down. They waited in the dark quiet, but only for a moment. "Mount up!" and they were moving again! The platoon headed down the central camp road and soon came to the old two-story plantation manager's house. In the roadway they found a jeep and a truck stopped. Their drivers lay to the side. "We rumbled closer," Bill Noyes recalls, "The men were not dead, but moving. Suddenly, several bullets ripped through the air around us. There were snipers in the old villa! We were airborne with this realization, feeling the weight of our weapons and the ammunition even before we landed, hard, in the dusty road." More shots flew past as they scrambled into the ditch along the masonry wall that lined the plantation manager's yard. While most huddled close to the ditch bottom, several others sprang up in succession to return fire. They fired for an instant, sometimes emptying their magazine at the buildings, then returned to the safety of the ditch to reload. Up again, another magazine gone, then down, quickly engulfing the roof and windows in gun fire. Then the yelling of the men behind the jeep told them to cease fire, claiming that there were friendlies on the opposite side assaulting the villa. So they lay in the dust and waited while the assault progressed unseen. After a few minutes, without any more shots coming their way, they were again ordered to board the tracks and move out. Unsure about the enemy in the house, they watched it closely expecting bullets as a send off as the tracks rolled quickly past and down the road. None came, and they left the plantation house in the morning grayness and dust.

Approaching an intersection further along Highway 14, which ran between the north and south gates, the platoon pulled over to the side of the road and stopped. Coming from the direction of the north gate, adjacent to the Wolfhound's sector, two trucks and a jeep appeared in the thin light and crossed in front of them. "Jungle-booted feet of corpses were revealed as they sped past going, no doubt, to the medical facility for processing. The small procession passed without response from us. We watched as experienced, but confused and embarrassed witnesses, fixed our machines awaiting further directions." Soon the orders came. The tracks clanked around the turn which led to the southwest gate. The news via radio had become tangled and vague as it spread through the squads atop each track. They were to "replace the guards who fled the bunker line in the engineer's sector." They'd been overrun; the number of enemy was unclear. The troopers worried about the stories of a massacre at the PX and the hospital, and doubted them also. It seemed that setting the situation straight was the mission of the third platoon alone. "Questions and complaints were our meek response to the orders. The choice, however, was not ours as the tracks obediently took us forward in the dim morning light!" Past the turn a short distance down the road lay



an American corpse in flack jacket and helmet sprawled next to a burned fuel storage bunker. "We all looked at him in passing, struck by his peaceful solitude amongst the trees that lined the deserted road. Continuing in the colorless morning light, we turned before reaching the main gate to follow the berm line road." As they rolled past, the shimmering carpet of leaves above the plantation floor were only moments away from admitting the shafts of warming sunlight. The empty buildings and bunkers scattered among the rubber trees along the perimeter road seemed like a city park without people. Stillness reigned as the trucks came to a halt and Noyes and the others clambered down. "We had come to the right place; the bunker line was empty except for corpses."

The dormant scene was revived by our wanderings and energized by the fresh rays of sun. "The dead watched with dust covered, void stares. They'd fallen along their pathway and they lay in shattered pieces in the bunkers. Their stories intrigued us. Several of us gathered around a sapper who had died at the entrance to the second abandoned bunker. We stood looking at him and talking about him, his age, and about the cowardly bunker guards. We were joined by two strangers, apparently from a bunker further up the line. No greetings had been exchanged when 'The Frog,' our youngest and most recent member, wondered what the sapper might hide beneath him. The Frog's foot moved to probe the body, too heavy to flip. One of the strangers exploded with indignation." Bill Noyes remembers. "In an instant the man was moving in defense of the dead flesh and we, our tempers flaring, to defend The Frog. The stranger was breathing smoke and fire; we were ready to jump and kill. The second stranger pushed the distraught man back from danger. Unnerved, we unchambered our weapons as the two men walked away. Slowly we settled down to our task of guarding the dead. They lay still and undisturbed until after we had left later on this bright morning."

Dau Tieng, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Base Camp, was attacked on 23 and 24 February 1969. Approximately two or three sapper companies were involved in successfully penetrating the base, a relatively small force. Had the enemy been able to commit a much larger force, a significant victory could possibly have been theirs. Instead, they lost the battle, but won the war.

Source: Bill Noyes, Third Platoon, B/2/22

### **Atop Foggy Nui Ba Den**

An ancient volcano, the massive fog-shrouded mountain of Nui Ba Den, juts abruptly from the flat farmlands of Tay Ninh Province. A South Vietnamese woman, Ba Den, who centuries ago climbed the mountain grieving the loss of her husband in war. She committed suicide hoping that her proximity to the clouds would result in the act being viewed directly by the Gods who would in turn unite her immediately with her dead husband. From its 3203 foot summit, all rivers and roads in the area can be seen. For years the mountain has had great military significance. Its peak has been occupied by the Japanese, the Viet Minh, the French and the Viet Cong. It is currently the possession of the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group who captured it in 1964.

The tall mountain has proven to be an extremely good reception point for radio and wireless communication, and during the last year, communications teams from various Army units have set up radio relay stations and re-transmission stations on the mountain top. One of these units is the 125<sup>th</sup> Signal DET from the 25<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. They moved to the mountain in March of 1967, and since that time have begun to operate extensive VHF and FM radio facilities. SGT Robert T. Hall of Lester, Pa., is the NCOIC for the seven man detachment. He is assisted by SGT James Tapia of Yuma, Ariz. At first the detachment had only one radio and lived in a tent pitched on the rocky peak. But since March they have acquired a whole bank of radios and corresponding electronic equipment, and have also built themselves a small but adequate barracks.

The detachment is broken down into two groups, the FM radio transmission team headed by Tapia, and the VHF section led by Hall. SP 4 Nicholas P. Masciotti of New York City, PFC George W. Lybarger of Buena Park, Calif., and PFC Robert H. Shaner III of East Greenville, Pa., make up the VHF section. All these men are qualified radio operators and are trained to perform minor radio repairs. Their job is to operate and maintain the 25<sup>th</sup> Inf Div VHF multi-channel equipment which relays transmissions between Cu Chi and Tay Ninh, Dau Tieng and all units operating in War Zone "C." The VHF section also has the responsibility of maintaining generators which supply electrical power for their radios and billets.

The FM team, consisting of PFC Randall C. Clark of St. Joseph, Mo., and PFC Eldon Walker of Houston, Tex., operates the FM re-transmission station located in a converted conex container. They automatically relay FM radio communications for the 25<sup>th</sup> Inf Div, 25<sup>th</sup> Div Arty, 3/4 CAV, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bde, 4<sup>th</sup> Inf, and 125<sup>th</sup> Signal Bn. Since FM transmission is limited by the line of sight (usually 25 to 30 miles), the mountain-top location enables radio communication to be increased in some cases up to 100 per cent. All men in the 125<sup>th</sup> Signal DET work six hour shifts with the radios. After that they are required to put in an additional five hours on camp detail (building bunkers, stringing barbed wire, making repairs, etc.) Plus two hours of guard duty every fourth night. Living atop a mountain has some unique problems, the biggest of which is resupply. According to 125<sup>th</sup> Signal Bn Commander LTC Louis G. Mathern Jr. of Toms River, N.J., all food and supplies are flown in by helicopter. Delivery is often delayed by the clouds and fog that blanket the peak. Mail usually comes once a week. Water has to be carried some 700 meters up the mountain by Vietnamese laborers. It is used for washing, and after boiling, for cooking. The men seldom drink it, for the VC use the same spring. The VC occupy the mountain too, and often harass the camp with mortar and sniper fire. The 125<sup>th</sup> Sig DET is responsible for one 81 mm mortar emplacement and three machine guns. They are trained to use them, and are frequently called on to do so.

Source: 1LT Larry Rottmann, 25 Infantry Division, Topic Lightning News, August 5, 1968.

### **More History About Nui Ba Den**

In 1964 the UTT Helicopter Company, the first armed helicopter company in the Army, using UH-1B Slicks and gun ships (also UH-1B's) made a combat assault landing on top of Nui Ba Den. The attacking force was made up of Special Forces advisors and irregular forces hired by the Special Forces then operating out of Saigon and Tay Ninh. The Second Platoon Commander of the UTT was Captain

Jack Johnson who later commanded the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC. The landing was made to establish a radio relay sight and deny the VC/NAV the use of the mountain top. Following the landing, the VC attacked the Special Forces camp night after night trying to throw the troops off of the top, but they never succeeded. The UTT flew mission after mission delivering rocket and machine gun fire into the attacking VC/NVA effectively stopping their attacks.

Several days after the camp was fortified, the UTT armament officer rigged up a 2.75 inch rocket pod on a tri-pod mount and with a UH-1 battery and switch was able to fire rockets down slope into the VC/NVA areas of the mountain. The UTT flew in rockets from Tay Ninh and left the Special Forces camp with a novel weapon to use against some surprised VC/NVA's.

When Major Jack Johnson took command of the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC, doing his second tour in Viet Nam, the top of Nui Ba Den was still occupied by American forces and the VC/NVA were still trying to throw them off of the top.

Source: Jack O. Johnson, CO 188<sup>th</sup>, Dec 1967 - Jun 1968.

### **"Kings" of the Mount Rise to the Occasion**

Nui Ba Den, Vietnam — A handful of American troops are walking about with their heads in the clouds — and it's all part of their assignment. The troopers, mostly signalmen, dwell at the peak of a solid hunk of granite call the Black Virgin Mountain — Vietnamese, Nui Ba Den. Rising 3,234 feet above the surrounding countryside, the rocky mountain is poised on the southeast edge of War Zone C, 65 miles northwest of Saigon and eight miles north of Tay Ninh. It was here, in the shadow of the mountain, units of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Inf. Divisions and the 196<sup>th</sup> Light Inf. Brigade killed 1,106 Reds in Operation Attleboro. It is the highest point in the southern half of the country and the only peak on the Tay Ninh plain. It is now used primarily for emergency radio relay. A Special Forces A Team, under the command of Lt. Samuel E. Seetin, Jr. of Lawrence, Kan., leads a Civilian irregular Defense Group (CIDG) in the defense of the mountain and its radio relation station. The station, with its web of antennas, is set up in an old temple. It covers the area from Tay Ninh to the tip of the Delta dn is operated by members of the 121<sup>st</sup> Sig. Bn., 1<sup>st</sup> Inf. Div., 125 Sig. Bn., 25<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.; and the 587<sup>th</sup> Sig. Co. There is very little room in the camp at the top of the mountain. Only one helicopter can land and take off at a time. And when, as often occurs, the mountain is ringed with clouds, choppers are unable to land and resupplies must wait.

Spec. 5 Bob Hartigan, a 1<sup>st</sup> Inf. Div. Signalman from new York, is considered the "papa-san" of the mountain, having spent 13 months there. Hartigan, who extended in Viet Nam to remain on the mountain top, said he finds life in the clouds rather relaxing. "There's always TV to while away the off-duty hours," he said. "Two days ago, we watched a fire-fight while eating chow," said Spec. 4 Don Burreau of Fowler, Ind. "We saw several air strikes and watched artillery hitting right at the foot of the mountain." Burreau denied he was watching the Army's popular "training" film, "Combat" at the time. The Americans live in thin-walled wooden buildings in the compound, however, more permanent quarters are presently being built for the mountain dwellers by the 588<sup>th</sup> Engineers. This will help to ward off 100 mph winds which often buffet the mountain top as well as keep the living quarters snug and more resistant to mortar attacks. The Viet Cong, believed to live around the base of the mountain, give the American and government troops little trouble. As one trooper put it: "We hold the high ground!" Located only a few miles from the Cambodian border, the Black Virgin Mountain is a key link in radio-telephone communication in actions against infiltrating enemy units. During Operation Junction City, the mountain's relay station handled artillery adjustment for the allies. The operators, who are on call 24 hours daily, see very little shut-eye during operations.

Source: Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, October 6, 1967. Gerard Forken, S&S Staff Correspondent

### **Nui Ba Den: Pilot Risks Life to Rescue a LRP**

Cu Chi — The toe of the light observation helicopter's right skid perched precariously on a boulder. The rotor blade chomped furiously at nearby trees. The chopper's body hung menacingly to the cliff's edge. At the base of the cliff nestled a Viet Cong base camp. The six-man long range patrol (LRP) realized their fate hung on the cliff with the chopper. They were out of food and water, and the VC knew they were there. The series of events bringing the courageous pilot to this perilous mountainside began four days earlier when a 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division patrol left the U.S. base on the 3,200-foot summit of Nui Ba Den in Tay Ninh Province. Their mission: to gather intelligence as they moved down the 45-degree, enemy-infested slopes and call for extraction two days later in the rice paddies at the base of the mountain. On the second day, the men neared the bottom only to find their planned exit blocked by a VC base camp. "We couldn't get through 'Charlie' so we tried to go back up and around and come down again," explained Sergeant Willard R. Ethridge, 19, of Atlanta, leader of the F Company, 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry, patrol. They tried . . . once, twice, three times. Each time they ran into Charlie. Finally, on the third day, "Charlie was up above us, down below us, on the right, and on the left," said Private First Class Roger F. VanRensselaer, 20, of Gardner, Mass.

Shortly before noon, two Huey Cobra gunships from D Troop, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, arrived and began spewing hot lead and rockets on the enemy trying to clear the area for helicopter extraction. A medevac chopper arrived to get the injured man out first. There was no clearing near the six men large enough for the slick's big rotor blade, and the plan was to drop a hoist for Specialist 4 Miller, 20 of Brownsville, Pa. The pilot hovered over twice, but both times enemy fire drove him off. Major Fred R. Michelson, 35, commanding officer of D Troop, from Clayton, Mo., was flying command and control in the OH-6A Cayuse light observation helicopter (LOH). He called for more fire power. Two Cobras from the Diamondhead Company of the 25<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion, two Huey gunships from the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Squadron, and two Air Force tactical jets soon joined the other Cobras in pounding the enemy. A second dust-off ship with a hoist arrived. As the pilot tried to get in close enough to drop his lift, enemy sniper fire knocked out the communications between the pilot and the hoist operator. To add to the bleakness, the clouds opened up, and a tropical downpour forced the helicopters to return to the 25<sup>th</sup> Division's base camp at Tay

Ninh. By the time the storm cleared, it was nearing dusk. Michelson decided that the only choice was to try to resupply the patrol and hope they could make it through the night. The gunships again lit up the foot of the mountain with their rockets and mini-guns as Warrant Officer Stephen R. Patterson piloted the LOH in over the men. Michelson leaned out on the skid and swung a bag of food, water, and radio batteries toward a granite ledge. It bounced, fell over the cliff, and rolled into the Viet Cong base camp below. Then Patterson, 22, of Riverside, Calif., spotted a boulder in a clearing — it was just wide enough to get one skid in. "I hovered down and put the toe of my right skid on the rock to steady the aircraft because of the bad updrafts. The LRP's handed out the injured man to Major Michelson," said Patterson. Having made it once, Patterson decided to take his four-seat chopper back for the other men.

Alone this time, he again perched his bird on the rock. VanRensselaer and Sergeant Ralph J. Hosey, Jr., 24, of Webster Springs, W. Va., leaped from the rock to the skid and into the chopper. "Every time they jumped on the aircraft, it would lurch, and I'd cut down a few small trees with my rotor," recalled the Three-Quarter CAV pilot. Three men were left, and it was getting dark. They had one more smoke grenade. Patterson radioed them to save it in case he didn't make the third try. He began hunting the mountainside for the spot. At one point he flew right over the VC base camp but did not draw any fire.

Finally, he found the ledge and hovered in again. The men threw on their radio and packs. Ethridge and Hitchens jumped on first. To the last man, Private First Class Merilan Henry, 20, the tiny helicopter looked full. And Patterson was fighting to recover the ship from a lurch caused by the weight. "I couldn't wait. I just dove in," Henry said. "All I could do was throw my feet on — the rest of my body was hanging over the side. I had my right hand on the pilot's chair, and the team leader was holding on to my left hand. For a minute I thought that was it," continued Henry of Columbia, S.C. With Henry hanging out the side, the LOH lifted away from the steep slope 1,200 feet up. What had looked impossible had been accomplished not once but three times. Modestly, Patterson admitted: "It did get a little hairy there for a while."

Source: 25th Infantry Division, Tropic Lightning News, August 5, 1968, 1LT Jim Leman

## **The Air Force at Dau Tieng**

As the Air Force upgraded its Forward Air Control aircraft to the new North American Rockwell OV-10A Bronco, I was issued orders to accompany two aircraft to Dau Tieng. Uphill! The runway goes uphill both ways — so much so you can't see another airplane at the other end of the runway. That was my first impression after leaving the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) at Bien Hoa and being assigned to the 3rd Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division.

A total of eight Air Force personnel were stationed at Dau Tieng. The four officers had their quarters in a beautiful old French villa, while our hootch was alongside the runway beside our aircraft. There were rubber trees surrounding the base, with more inside the perimeter, all planted in very straight rows. At first I thought they were nice looking, but rubber trees hide snipers easily and I had my very own sniper. As I would refuel the aircraft in the evening, my guy would take shots at me from the tree line. The whizzing of rounds by me was very unnerving, but the troops on the bunker line couldn't get permission to return fire. It was said that the people from Michelin would charge \$168.00 for every tree that was damaged. Milking of rubber trees is accomplished by cutting into the bark and collecting the sap. Bullets made the trees leak, thus permission to open fire was denied. Still, the Michelin airplane, an Otter, landed at Dau Tieng twice a week, supposedly to collect for damaged trees. It would be a long time before I bought a tire made by Michelin.

As Forward Air Controllers, we serve as intermediaries between the ground troops and the bombers or fighters. Usually armed with only smoke rockets, we fly relatively low and slow looking for movement, trails, bunkers, and caches. When a target is spotted, fighters or bombers are called in. We shoot our smoke at the enemy, then tell the pilot to "hit the smoke," or "hit three meters to the right." This is necessary as the planes are traveling too fast to locate a target such as "the third tree on the right."

Just after Christmas, 1968, I arrived at Dau Tieng to find the place received quite a few rockets and mortars per day. I still have the utmost respect for the troops who ran out when we were being mortared to try to determine where the rounds were coming from. I don't know what kind of tool they used, but they placed it in the smoking hole and called in where they thought the enemy rounds were coming from. Brave souls!

Most F.A.C. (Forward Air Control) missions in the OV-10A were 2 hours, 15 minutes, with 15 minutes overlap time. If it was slow — nothing happening — the pilots would sometimes put on a little demonstration of a mock dogfight — inches apart at about 200 mph. These events helped to keep the boredom to a minimum.

In January or early February 1969, the bunker line was improved by putting a ten foot high dirt wall around the perimeter. The tree line was moved back. After all, we had already paid for the trees! Along with these improvements, we put in four revetments for aircraft parking and installed P.S.P. (perforated steel planking) on the ramp and revetments. This kept the wheels from sinking in the mud. As we had been receiving a heavy incoming dose of rockets and mortars, we decided to build an underground bunker with sleeping quarters. We dug a 12 foot deep hole and lowered two conexes back-to-back. We installed vents in the top, built stairs, and placed layers of P.S.P. and sand-filled pine boxes originally used for shipping our 2.75 inch rockets. It was a thing of beauty!

The two weeks preceding Tet 1969 were very quiet, too quiet, nervous quiet. No incoming rounds or mortars and little enemy troop movements makes you ponder what is about to happen. Well. . . Tet happened! Shortly before midnight, around the third week of February, while everyone was sleeping, we received a barrage of incoming mortars. Because this broke the ominous lull, we decided to get completely dressed — flak jacket and pot — to check the aircraft for damage from shrapnel. The revetments were full that evening with two OV-10's, one LOACH helicopter, and three O-1 Bird Dogs. As I rounded the corner to check on the planes, the one Bird Dog O-1 that was sticking out of the revetment exploded in a ball of flame. I realize it's time to take cover. Within minutes the siren went off, indicating that the wire had been breached. Unfortunately, we are in a bunker that has no firing position, just protection from incoming. "Damn!" we sure

wished our underground bunker and things might have turned out differently.

Vietnamese voices at night are not what you want to hear, and they were all around us! The glow from the burning airplane illuminated the bunker entrance mixed with shouts and small arms fire. A few more explosions too close for comfort and we quickly decide to close ranks with the Army guys at the French villa next door. Before we can do this the bunker entrance darkens as a Viet Cong comes in. Squeezing the trigger of my M-16, only 3 or 4 rounds fire before it jams, and I am the only guy in a position to fire. Before I could grab Sgt. Ron MacAvey's M-16, there was an explosion in the bunker entrance and the Vietnamese voices departed. Seconds later another voice calls out, "Hey, Air Force," but I don't answer as some Vietnamese speak English well. Then, I hear it again, "Hey, Air Force." This time I answer, "We're OK and coming your way."

Fifty yards, at the most, from our bunker to the safety of the Army troops at the French villa. With small arms fire all around, I lead us to the villa, but Technical Sergeant Dupere only makes it about 25 yards when he's hit. Sgt. MacAvey and Sgt. Ron White run back and drag him in. It's not good — a chest wound through the flak jacket. He is taken to the first aid station and the guys are sent back. We learn the next day that he dies of that wound. "Phone for you," someone from the Army says. It's Major Holland wanting to launch the aircraft. "Sorry sir, the glow in the dark you see is some of the aircraft burning, and what's not burning has been damaged." We are then assigned fighting positions to push back the Viet Cong. As the mixture of sweat and ground-in dirt mix with the fear and anger, I realize that fighting from the air is much safer with a more remote sense of personal involvement.

Looking from the bunker towards the end of the runway and beyond to the rubber trees, there's lots of movement coming our way. An APC is burning furiously at the end of the runway. We are about to receive air support in the form of an OV-10 directing napalm onto the Viet Cong that are coming from the Michelin Rubber Plantation. A Cobra helicopter is directly over us at about 100 feet firing 2.75 inch H.E. (high explosive) rockets into the ditch along the runway. The rockets are striking 50 to 100 feet away — now I get the experience of Close Air Support. Sunrise comes after the longest night of my life and allows us to survey the carnage all around us. There is still small arms fire from one side of the runway to the other when the unbelievable happens. Some guy from the Army just starts walking down the middle of the runway. He doesn't hear, or doesn't care, as we shout for him to take cover. We stop firing, and they stop firing, and this guy continues to the end of the runway. Everyone looks at each other in disbelief. The clean-up starts immediately. Bodies and body parts are removed after the unexploded ordnance is cleared. We survey the aircraft to find that the LOACH helicopter is burned to a crisp, as is one of the O-1 Bird Dogs. Both OV-10's suffer damage to the landing gear and cockpit areas. We also lost our power unit; it burned to the ground. The remains of the power unit produces an interesting artifact when the aluminum melts and flows into something that resembles North and South Vietnam.

After the clean-up, the remaining three of us enlisted Air Force work feverishly on completing our new underground bunker. With all the rounds and shrapnel that flew the night we were overrun, the two refrigerators that kept our beer the coldest in all of Dau Tieng have come through with nary a scratch. An Air Force Major is sent to survey the damage. He looks at the aircraft and says, "Junk this one and that one. We'll send helicopters to pick up the damaged ones." Even though we still got rocketed and mortared, none of it seemed to be as serious as it was during the Tet Offensive. I remained at Dau Tieng until June when our group was redeployed to Cu Chi. Of the three places I was stationed in Viet Nam, I have the strongest feelings for Dau Tieng.

Source: Sgt. Michael Stirling

### **Military Police Spot and Stop Enemy Advance on Dau Tieng**

3D BDE — Military police from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, 25<sup>th</sup> military Police Company drove off an undetermined number of Viet Cong who were attempting to approach the 25 Infantry Division's base camp at Dau Tieng.

As the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade MP's were closing their check point at the edge of the Michelin Rubber Plantation one evening, the often routine task of monitoring the flow of natives in and out of the village of Dau Tieng was broken when they spotted a force of armed Viet Cong slinking toward the community. They immediately engaged the enemy with machine guns and small arms as the Viet Cong replied with a fusillade of rifle and rocket fire. The enemy pinned down SP/4 Wayne Luke, a machine gunner, who, despite the heavy enemy fire, changed barrels on his M-60 burning himself in the process, and resumed blasting away at the enemy. A reaction force was dispatched from the base camp as soon as the contact was reported and deployed at the embattled checkpoint. With darkness falling, it became necessary to close the checkpoint and withdraw into the Dau Tieng base camp for the night.

Source: Stars & Stripes Newspaper, 12 July 1968

### **Pacification Assessment, Tri Tam District, Binh Duong Province, RVN** **3 March 1970**

#### **Security**

Security is the sine qua non, ("without which not", Latin, an absolute prerequisite), of an effective pacification program. Since mid-1966 one brigade of U.S. troops has been stationed in Tri Tam District; at times, in 1966/1967, up to two brigades operated in the area. On 15 February 1970, the U.S. forces were reduced in numbers and by July there will probably be no U.S. maneuver elements operating in the District. The redeployment of U.S. troops was made possible by the withdrawal of major VC/NVA units, the inactivity of local force and guerrilla elements, and the improvement of ARVN. While the threat has been greatly reduced, it has by no means been eliminated. Two major points must be considered. First, that Tri Tam can be reached with relative ease over routes leading from the Cambodian border

through predominantly heavily jungled terrain. Secondly, that Tri Tam constitutes an important way station between the Cambodian sanctuary and Saigon, especially since the traditional stopover, the Iron Triangle, has been rone-plowed.

It can be inferred then that a threat to the District will remain. In order to keep the enemy in his present posture of avoiding contact, a believable deterrent must exist in the District, i.e. elements of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in sufficient strength and quality, to put a prohibitive price tag in human lives on enemy operations and deny the enemy provisions and the use of lines of communication.

In order to provide security for pacification, 3 ARVN maneuver battalions with supporting elements, 4 RF Companies and 8 PF platoons will be required. These elements would optimally be employed as follows: 1 ARVN battalion whose AO would include the Michelin and the northern part of the District, at Dau Tieng; 1 battalion at FSB KIEN with the mission of operating in the Trapezoid; and 1 battalion at FSB TENNESSEE. This unit would operate in the lower Trapezoid and interdict the Saigon River. RF Companies would be located at Ap 1, Dinh Thanh (present location of RF Company 396), Suoi Dua, Co Trach and Ben Chua. The PF Platoons would occupy the Dau Tieng bridge, the other would relieve the platoon from RF Company 170 in Dinh An.

The following remarks are based on the assumption that a security force as outlined above will be present in the District after the redeployment of the U.S. forces.

#### **Political Considerations**

A substantial portion of the District's population has been exposed to NLF (National Liberation Front) propaganda for a considerable length of time. The Michelin refugees and the inhabitants of Thanh An village have a high percentage of relatives in the enemy ranks. The reduced production level of the Michelin Plantation tends to keep families on a low economic level which invites, and probably makes believable, some Communist propaganda. To the people of Thanh An, and tangible benefits stemming from association with their legal government are of relatively recent origin. These benefits—more security (not a real benefit to the VC family whose relative is prevented from visiting them), a school in Ben Thanh, an open road to the market town—are outweighed by some unfavorable circumstances brought on by the presence of the government to this point. These include the rice denial program (which must seem oppressive to the VC household deprived of provisions for their relatives in the jungle), the forced consolidation program (which caused nearly 200 people to "vote with their feet" by moving out of the District), the limitation of vehicular traffic between Thanh An and Dinh Thanh, and the stationing of external forces in the hamlets.

On the other hand, a portion of the inhabitants of Dinh Thanh (Dau Tieng) have undoubtedly prospered. Employment at the U.S. base camp, "skilled" (factory) employment at the Michelin Plant, legal and illicit dealing and trading, and unmolested farming and gardening have contributed to prosperity. Security conditions are better in Dinh Thanh, and taxes paid to the VC by the Michelin and well-to-do citizens further reduce the risk of economic dislocation. The government has had a more favorable impact, in part due to substantial U.S. support in monies, commodities and materials distributed through VN channels, including the VSDP. Schools, medical services (largely U.S. until now), and administrative services are available. Economic restrictions are decidedly less stringent in Dinh Thanh, therefore a fairly wide range of goods is offered in the market place.

Fact: there are two main groups of differing political outlook in this District. The group already favorable to the government must not be disappointed by a relaxation in security. The hostile or indifferent group must be convinced that their allegiance will be rewarded by the government. How can these goals be accomplished?

#### **Essential Elements**

As pertains to security, the number and type of units considered essential has been enumerated. In addition, all these units and the PSDF must undergo continued motivation training. Improvement of leadership at all levels is extremely important. U.S. advisory presence is mandatory to monitor and correctly report developments. Politically, a greatly improved information effort is an absolute must. Current VIS personnel show a deplorable lack of imagination. The government must make its presence felt in every respect throughout the District. While schools are adequate in Dinh Thanh and Dinh An, facilities are yet to be built in Thanh An, with the exception of Ben Thanh. The Ben Thanh school was constructed and initially staffed by the 8<sup>th</sup> ARVN Regiment.

The elections to be held in Thanh An in June should be very closely supervised on Province level to permit a really free choice for the people. The population consolidation must be carried out with extreme efficiency and a minimum of inconvenience to the families affected. This will again require reenforcement of District personnel by Province-level cadre. From the viewpoint of many civil servants and officials, Tri Tam is an undesirable assignment. This thinking tends to affect the quality of their work and causes "personnel turbulence" as individuals are trying to get reassigned out of the District. Province-level officials up to this point have been very reluctant to visit Tri Tam District; they must be encouraged from a high level to spend a few days in the District every month.

Medical services, which to this point were largely provided by the U.S. forces, must be taken over by the Vietnamese. The present Dispensary chief is not qualified for this task. The RF/PF and RDC must be familiarized with the idea that civic action becomes their responsibility under the "Combined Campaign Plan for 1970". A pilot project utilizing RF/PF labor has just been "sold" to the District Chief and might serve as an auspicious beginning. To fulfill their intended role, the RD Cadre must be better motivated and supervised.

Economic considerations become extremely important for pacification and development. From a peak level of 900, employment by U.S. forces will drop to 200 by mid April and probably to zero by July. Businesses affected by this withdrawal are souvenir shops, a photo shop, tailor shops, laundries, barber shops and pig raising. Illegal activities, the black market, drug traffic and prostitution are fast becoming less profitable. The economic potential of the District now rests mainly with the Michelin Plantation. If the low level of fighting persists or, preferable for economic development, a cease-fire be announced, the Michelin Corporation would be in a good position to increase operations. Labor is readily available, young trees can be planted, rone-plowed areas can be taken under cultivation and machinery. Of some help would be the re-opening of the Saigon River as a traffic artery and the extension of fishing rights, which would create some



additional employment. The smaller plantation owners would also be encouraged to extend or restart operations. While the possibility of developing additional rice land exists, it involves only small areas. The bulk of the fallow rice land in the District is located in Than Tuyen village ("Ben Suc"). The pacification- "return to village" - of this area is considered a remote prospect, probably not within this calendar year. It should not even be attempted without first planning for a high-speed all-weather road from Ben Cat. With easy access to jungled areas, the lumber industry in the District could prosper again. The Village Self-Development Program does not create new jobs; however, it does succeed in boosting the economic standards of the less affluent.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The year 1970 will see a struggle for the allegiance of the District population. With security remaining at its present/adequate level, government agencies have access to the entire population of the District. The number and quality of government programs instituted and the level of involvement of the local populace will have a strong effect on swaying loyalties away from the Communists.

As stated before, a second, equally important, factor is the economic situation in Tri Tam District. With recruiting by the Michelin Plantation ameliorating the U.S. withdrawal, an acceptable level of economic stability can be maintained. A maximum effort by all GVN agencies will be required to stabilize and enhance the government's position in the District. To this end, a continued, strong advisory effort remains a necessity.

Source: Major R.H. Egersdorfer

### **44th Scout Dog Platoon**

The 44<sup>th</sup> Scout Dog platoon was in the Michelin Rubber Plantation just off the main road through Camp Rainier. Our platoon area was approximately 100 yards from the southeast gate with a small village immediately outside the gate. My platoon consisted of an officer, Lieutenant Robert Fenner, a vet tech, John Glennon, one E-7 platoon sergeant, four NCO squad leaders, and 24 enlisted grunts.

Our unit was originally formed at Ft. Benning, Georgia and the enlisted grunts consisted of individuals who had initially attended officer's candidate school, but failed for one reason or another in completing same. We were given a choice of either going into the newly forming 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade scheduled for Vietnam deployment, or to volunteer for the Scout Dogs. Obviously, I was one of the fortunate ones to enter the Scout Dogs. Our unit was founded in the spring of 1966 and deployed to Vietnam around Christmas after extensive training in Georgia and the swamps of Alabama.

Each of our four squads flew over to Vietnam in a C-130. Each C-130 carried a loaded deuce and a half, 12 dogs in their cages, and either a loaded trailer or jeep for immediate deployment by each squad. It took four days for each of the C-130's to arrive in Vietnam and we spent two or three days at Camp Red Ball (just outside Tan Son Nhut AFB) staging prior to convoying to Dau Tieng. We spent a couple of weeks living out of platoon sized tents in the rubber plantation, but managed to trade the engineers a 30 kw generator for materials and services resulting in 4 webstock barracks, officer's quarters, an enlisted club, vet tech office/quarters, 3 hole out-house, and modern kennels with concrete floors. Each squad made a four week rotation consisting of one week providing point for 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup>, one week kennel duty and perimeter patrols at base camp, one week with 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Mech, and one week with the MP's and ARVN's doing night time "rat patrol" in the village of Dau Tieng. Duty assignments with the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> included numerous Eagle Flights with the Black Widows. The purpose of our unit was to provide a point man (handler) and a scout dog to any unit requesting assistance in receiving advance warning of enemy positions and stores while moving a friendly infantry force through concealable terrain. The dogs were capable of providing "alerts" of up to 400 yards. The handler was trained to differentiate what the K9 was alerting on and could provide the command staff with a high degree of probability of what lay ahead and give an approximate distance. This capability prevented friendly forces of entering into an ambush situation and made our task that of an aggressor rather than a defender.

On June 24, 1967, my unit area was the first to get hit with the initial mortar fire. I and my colleagues had been in the club when the first rounds hit and caused us to scramble into a partially buried conex behind the club which we constructed as a bunker/bomb shelter. One of the mortar rounds landed on the kennel and fatally wounded my dog "Eric" #36X3, and Shaddow. After the mortar attack subsided, members of my unit that were in camp manned the perimeter by the gate bordering the small village. No breaching was done in this area; however, an encroachment was allegedly made by the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup>'s battalion area. I have received some after-action reports from the 44<sup>th</sup> IPSP from the VHDA which proved very sketchy. I regret that the army failed to train us in adequately compiling a daily journal for submission to our commanders for the purpose of accountability and history concerning the production of the K-9 Corp. Eric had been hit by a piece of shrapnel on an earlier occasion after giving a 50 yard alert on a squad of Viet Cong waiting for us in ambush. The ambush was thwarted, but cost Eric a wound in his rear flank. As it ended up, I had to carry him to a LZ where he was medi-evaced back to Dau Tieng. Our vet tech could not handle the wound and we had to fly to the animal hospital in Tan Son Nhut in a bubble observation helicopter. About seven days later, we were back with the unit.

Source: Ollie Whetstone

## Medal of Honor

### **Hartstock, Robert W.**

**Rank and Organization:** Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, 44<sup>th</sup> Scout Dog  
**Platoon:** 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division  
**Born:** January 24, 1945, Cumberland, Maryland  
**Place and Date:** Binh Duong Province. Tri Tam District, Camp Rainier, Dau Tieng, Republic of Vietnam, February 23, 1969

#### **Citation:**

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. S/Sgt. Hartstock distinguished himself in action while serving as section leader with the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Scout Dog Platoon. When the Dau Tieng Base Camp (Camp Rainier) came under a heavy enemy rocket and mortar attack, S/Sgt. Hartstock and his platoon commander spotted an enemy sapper squad which had infiltrated the camp undetected. Realizing the enemy squad was heading for the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade Tactical Operations Center (TOC) and nearby prisoner compound, they concealed themselves and, although heavily outnumbered, awaited the approach of the hostile soldiers. When the enemy was almost upon them, S/Sgt. Hartstock and his platoon commander opened fire on the squad. As a wounded enemy soldier fell, he managed to detonate a satchel charge he was carrying. S/Sgt. Hartstock, with complete disregard for his life, threw himself on the charge and was gravely wounded. In spite of his wounds, S/Sgt. Hartstock crawled about five meters to a ditch and provided heavy suppressive fire, completely pinning down the enemy and allowing his commander to seek shelter. S/Sgt. Hartstock continued his deadly stream of fire until he succumbed to his wounds. S/Sgt. Hartstock's extraordinary heroism and profound concern for the lives of his fellow soldiers were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

NOTE: The following is a newspaper account of the battle for which S/Sgt. Hartstock was awarded the Medal of Honor:

### **Allies Say Foe Has Begun Long-expected Offensive**

Saigon, South Vietnam, Monday, Feb. 24, 1969 — Enemy troops, striking simultaneously at Saigon and about 105 other towns and military targets throughout the country, have launched what the Allied Command considers the long-predicted general offensive. The enemy troops poured rockets and mortar shells into 17 provincial capitals, 28 towns, and about 60 military installations. In most places the attackers confined themselves to shelling and held their ground assaults to a minimum. An exception was the base camp of the Third Brigade of the 25<sup>th</sup> I.D. at Dau Tieng in the Tri Tam District of Binh Duong Province where two enemy battalions — about 1,000 men — charged the position under the covering fire of mortar rounds. The enemy sappers briefly broke through the defensive perimeter, but were repulsed by the infantrymen who were supported by Army helicopter gunships, artillery, and tactical air strikes. A high American military source said last night that the Allied Command considered the day's attacks to be the beginning of a general offensive that would probably last most of the week.

Source: Jordan, Sr., Kenneth N. *Heroes of our Time — 239 Men of the Vietnam War Awarded the Medal of Honor 1964 - 1972*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1994.

### **UPI Newspaper Article**

**April 1972**

Enemy forces, meanwhile, launched heavy attacks against the district capital of Dau Tieng at the edge of the old Michelin rubber plantation, 40 miles northwest of Saigon.

Military officials said "the situation at Dau Tieng looks very bad," adding the city likely would have been to be abandoned in the face of any heavy North Vietnamese attacks because of the lack of manpower in the region.

### **Dau Tieng History 1969**

At one time Tri Tam was called Dau Tieng and was a Canton District of Gia Dinh Province. According to an old legend, there was a century-old tree (Dau = tree) which was very well-known by the people of the area (tieng = well-known). Hence the name Dau Tieng evolved: a well-known, venerable old tree. Dau Tieng canton contained seven villages. Later in history, Dau Tieng was incorporated with Ben Cat canton into Binh Duong Province.

By 1923 the Michelin Company cleared a large area in Tri Tam and used this area for the cultivation of rubber trees. Tri Tam has been populous and wealthy because of the presence of the Michelin Plantation and several other smaller plantations which have originated since 1923.

After the Japanese left Viet Nam in 1945, Dau Tieng became a district instead of a canton. The district was governed by a French military officer who was called the District Chief. The district was governed by the French until 1954. In July 1958 a decree from the President of Viet Nam changed the district's name from Dau Tieng to Tri Tam. However, some people still refer to the district as Dau Tieng. At the present time Tri Tam is divided into three villages: Dinh Thanh (Dau Tieng) the largest village and seat of the district government, Dinh An, and Thanh An. Three other villages, Thanh Tuyen, Thu Nhon, and Dinh Tho have been abandoned in the past few years although they are still referred to as divisions by the Viet Cong Infrastructure. Politically motivated, the Viet Cong would have someone designated to become the village chief after their victory.

## **Geography**

Tri Tam District is bounded on the west by the Saigon River. Adjacent districts are Khiem Hanh (Tay Ninh Province), and Trang Bang (Han Nghia Province) on the west, Phu Hoa on the south, Ben Cat to the east, and Chon Thanh (Bin Long Province) on the north. Lines of communication in Tri Tam are potentially excellent. A good road network connects Tri Tam with each of its neighboring Districts and Provinces. The Saigon River runs the length of Tri Tam providing a commercial route within the District and also making Saigon and Phu Cuong readily accessible. There are 2,700 hectares (one hectare equals 10,000 square meters) of rice field in Tri Tam, 12,500 hectares of rubber and fruit trees, and 30,600 hectares of forest. The climate in Tri Tam is not uniform and does not agree with those not indigenous to the area. The sunny season lasts from December to May.

## **Population**

The population of the Tri Tam is predominantly Vietnamese; about 14,000 people inhabit the District. There are also 150 Chinese and 100 Cambodian residents in Tri Tam. The majority of the people are engaged in rural farming activities yet about 1,000 families are employed to work the rubber plantations. Many of the residents of Dinh Thanh work for the U.S. base camp. The predominant religion of Tri Tam is Buddhism, however, there are many Catholics and Cao Dais in the District. Seven pagodas and three churches serve the religious needs of Tri Tam.

## **Industry**

The rubber industry is the most important industry in Tri Tam. Of course, the Michelin Plantation and processing plant are the largest operations. However, there are four other producing plantations now in Tri Tam. Other industries are the ice factory, the rice mill, the brick yard, and the charcoal kiln.

## **Government and Social Institutions**

Tri Tam has an abundance of schools including two high schools, two public elementary schools, a Catholic school system, a Chinese school, a school for military dependants, and a group of primary schools in the outlying areas of the District. Health facilities in Tri Tam consist of a dispensary and maternity hospital staffed with a health technician, two midwives, and a rural nurse. The government of Viet Nam is represented in the District by the Post Office, the Police Station, Health Service, VIS (Viet Nam Information Service), and Chieu Hoi Office.

## **Military**

The military arm of the GVN is represented by the sub-sector headquarters, three Regional Forces companies, and six Popular Force platoons. At the present time the District Chief sub-sector commander is LTC Nguyen Ngoc Chau.

## **Camp Rainier Base Camp, Dau Tieng**

On 22 November 1966, the forward Command Post of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrived at Dau Tieng, Tri Tam District. The brigade established its HQ in the residential areas of the Michelin Rubber Plantation in Dinh Thanh Village. On 26 December 1966, all units assigned or attached to the brigade were in position.

The Brigade Base Camp was named Camp Rainier after the mountain peak which was seen from Ft. Lewis, Washington, home of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. On 1 August 1967 the brigade was redesignated the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. On 1 July 1969 the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division replaced the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was redeployed to the United States in March of 1970, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, first the 2<sup>nd</sup> and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade assumed control over an AO encompassing the District.

## **Advisory Team 91 — Tri Tam**

The District Advisory Team assists the Vietnamese in all aspects of District operations and administration. In addition, the team provides liaison between the District and U.S. elements in the District. They are the DSA (District Senior Advisor), DIOCC (District Intel/OP'S Combined center — S-2, S-3), OP'S/INTEL, hamlet security, medic, and RTO's. The current team is composed of six members: a radio operator, a medic, a hamlet/village security NCO, an operations/intelligence advisor, a DIOCC officer, and the District Senior Advisor. In addition, a Mobile Advisory Team consisting of five members, and the 18<sup>th</sup> Civilian Affairs Platoon consisting of three members, are currently operationally assigned to Advisory Team 91, Tri Tam. The platoon consists of a 1LT, a SSG Interpreter (fluent in Vietnamese), and a Sergeant Medic.

Source: Major Rudolf H. Egersdorfer

## **The Siege of Tri Tam**

Your recent letter to the PSA (Providence Senior Advisor) of Team 91 was forwarded to me in light of the fact that as current DSA of Tri Tam, I could better answer your questions. Due to unit stand downs elsewhere, I was assigned this job in August and will DEROS next month; nevertheless, I'll fill you in on as much of the activity as I know.

There are only two members on the district team now—myself and an NCO; and it looks as though this will be the last month for district teams in Binh Duong. The days of the large teams are past, in fact there are only 22 members on Team 91. In September 71, the DSA, DDSA, District Chief, and interpreter were killed in an ambush at Suoi Dua (between Dau Tieng and BEN SUC on LTC14). The new

District Chief is LTC Nghia, formerly deputy district chief of Lai Thieu. He's as close to an American commander I've run across. The old 25<sup>th</sup> Division Base Camp was turned over to the ARVN & suffered the usual fate, it is nothing but desolate junkyard after the salvagers.

The current tactical and political situation in Tri Tam is grim. It all started in the Easter offensive in April at which time the NVA decided they wanted free access of the roads and jungles of Tri Tam District. Starting at the southern end of Highway 14, the enemy overran every outpost until they got to Suoi Dua stream. Simultaneously, they pushed all friendly forces in from the East until GVN Troops were all located in Tri Tam City itself. Adding some icing to the cake, the VC moved in and occupied AP5 and were only driven out after US and GVN Tac Air had blown the hamlet away. Once the enemy had the land he wanted, he pulled back and left the GVN forces alone. Needless to say, all pacification advances up to the date were thoroughly disrupted and the district has never fully recovered.

Things remained quiet for some time and minimal advances were made in reconstruction. Even when I came here in August, some people were still trying to recover from the offensive. Enemy activity was light, and we were able to get a few developmental things going, including a new hamlet in Dinh An, a soccer field and two soccer teams. These things were short lived however, and were put to a stop on 25 October when the enemy acted up again.

From that date to the present, the 271<sup>st</sup> NVA Regiment (271<sup>st</sup> VC Regiment 66/67) has had a siege on the city and its adjacent hamlets. Since no attempt was ever made to reoccupy the outposts lost in April, this was not a difficult task for them to do. The siege is unique in that the enemy is using only minimal ground forces, yet they are backed up with good support. Using US 155 and 105 howitzers, Soviet 122 arty, 107 and 122 Rockets, 82 and 60 mm mortars, 75 and 57 recoilless rifles, B40 and B41's and even wire guided anti tank missiles, they have kept the friendly forces pretty much at bay. The first six days, we averaged in excess of 70 rounds of artillery alone and innumerable other rounds. Casualties and damage have been rather steep. US air (as at An Loc) has done the most to neutralize the enemy, yet, as you know, it can't do all the work. We have knocked out all their big guns except for a 105 which even as I'm typing this continues to H&I us. The only way in and out of here is by chopper, and these have to be put in at alternating LZ's each time in order to minimize the possibility of damage and casualties to personnel in the chopper and on the ground. Our main problem has been motivation. As I experienced with US forces who didn't want to be the last US infantryman to die in VN, now the Vietnamese don't want to be the last Vietnamese to die before the cease fire. Personally, I think the cease fire will never come from the Vietnamese, yet the soldiers are plagued by rumors which are hurting their effectiveness. We lost Ap 5 and three outposts as a result of morale collapse and it took four days of fighting to get them back. Even the fighting lacked spirit. And the thing that gets you the most is the VC have maybe 100 troops on the ground spread out in squad or platoon size locations around the city and that is all they have for infantrymen. We have nearly 1000 GVN troops, but they are staying right around the city, confused and running as a result of the skillfully executed VC guerilla tactics. Right now things have quieted down somewhat, but the struggle is still continuing. Suoi Dua was lost but retaken only to fall again, all because of morale. Today we're trying to reoccupy it.

Support has been good from the US and only marginal from the Vietnamese. One would think it would be better since this is the closest that weapons of this size and type have ever been employed to Saigon. Oh, yes antiaircraft guns ranging from 12.7-14.5-23-37mm are all around but not too effective. Of the 85 air strikes put in, only two VNAF Skyraiders have been shot down, and both pilots were recovered. I feel the enemy is using cooks and bottle washers to man the artillery and AAA pieces. They were obviously hurt bad in the Spring Offensive and they are using whatever personnel they can dig up, which is good in some respects. Still these guys were trained sufficiently to be able to blow away most of the team house to include our latrine! If the Vietnamese would only go out in the rubber, it would be very easy to capture and silence these guns.

The name of the game now is to let them do their own work, but they have been spoiled by the US for so long it is hard for them to do things on their own. Consequently they get frustrated and angry at times when the US does not react to their requests and you tell them to ask for Vietnamese support. It is hard for us to not request US support for our own protection since we are threatened daily just as much as the VN are. Still, it has to be that way and they'll have to get used to using their own support.

I can't answer too much about the rest of the province since we only pick up sketches here and there on the tactical radio and that's about our only link to the rest of Vietnam. Apparently your news coverage is better than it is in VN. Stars and Stripes has only been mentioned Tri Tam once in a three line sentence, and it was incorrect. AFVN has said nothing. Of course, the name of that game is to paint a rosy picture and not let the people know how shaky some situations are. For example, Minh Thanh (to the NE) was under siege for six months and no one did anything for them. Of all the regional and popular forces there, only about 30 survived to escape back to friendly lines. The rest were killed, murdered, died of wounds or starved to death. There was nothing in the news media about that. Let me know if I can be of more assistance to you, but to make it fast, because we'll be gone in about two weeks.

When the communists finally defeated the ARVN in April 1975, Dau Tieng was set up as a re-education camp for South Vietnamese POW's and political refugees who supported the United States. The Russians arrived and helped rebuild the rubber processing plant and renamed the Michelin Plantation, The National Rubber Plantation.

Source: Letter written to Major Egersdorfer on 17 November 1972 from Captain John W. Mathews

## **Tri Tam District, Binh Duong Province**

### **July 1969-1970**

In the almost thirty years since I left Tri Tam, I have considered writing the story of my year as District Senior Advisor (DSA), and there is much to tell. A good bit of it is not pretty, other DSA's had different experiences or perhaps still refuse to face facts. Admittedly, in a number of cases I could act outside the box, and mostly got away with it. There were reasons for that: the Big Red One patch on my right sleeve from my first tour was immensely helpful with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bde, 1<sup>st</sup> ID stationed in Tri Tam until early 1970; the experience and knowledge I

had gathered in nine months on the job was generally accepted by the 25<sup>th</sup> ID who succeeded the 1<sup>st</sup> ID; and, last but not least, the DEPCORDS, Mr. Charlie Whitehouse (later ambassador to Thailand) considered me professionally competent, and backed me.

Much of what SMG Rahlf wrote in his report applied to my tenure as well. What had changed, however, was of great impact: the stated policy of Vietnamization, i.e., turning the war over to the Vietnamese. For years, it was mainly US forces which fought the major VC/NVA units in War Zones C and D. Very importantly, we supported and supplied Vietnamese forces, often on a lavish scale, from airlift and artillery support to fuel, ammunition, food, engineer material and so on. The black market's impact on the Vietnamese must not be underestimated, especially where we had large concentrations of troops, such as Tri Tam. Certain of our allies fed the market profusely but without the participation of the US soldier, it could not have flourished as it did. (We sold incredible amounts of hair spray in the PX, did our soldiers use that? The smallest b/w TV in the Dau Tieng PX cost around \$90, it "retailed" for \$450. Not a skimpy profit). The Vietnamese realized very quickly that all this would go away with the departure of the American forces, and many redoubled their efforts, often at the expense of their war/political efforts, to have a final go at the "riches." The DSA's were in the front line of this contest between Vietnamese dedication to duty or booty.

DSA's were instructed to counter requests for most support/supplies by referring to Vietnamese sources, e.g., ARVN, VNAF, and VN logistics channels. For years, supplies such as gasoline were transferred by the US in bulk to VN agencies for distribution. At the Province level, gas was withheld, not in the least to fuel the many unauthorized (civilian or (stolen) military vehicles), and the District Chiefs who had an American base in their area—in Binh Duong, three of the six: Tri Tam (Camp Rainier), Phuoc Vinh ( a 1<sup>st</sup> Div Bde), Ben Cat (Lai Khe 1<sup>st</sup> ID HQ) habitually got their gas from the US through the good offices of their advisors. This gas was probably the Number 1 priority, example (Tri Tam): District Chief; Deputy; S-1 thru 4; National Police Chief; Special Police Chief (had jeeps); information cadre (Tri-Lambretta); military aid station (FLA); civilian health clinic (US Mil. Amb.), troop carriers (Japanese-made trucks to mobilize one RF Co); some of the business people (friends of District Chief); the motor bikes of the PRU (Provincial Recon Unit—ex VC in our pay), and many more I can't recall, plus numerous generators (mostly US Army, and ill-gained, few of which were used for military purposes) depended on TM 91 to come up with the gas. When the District Chief invited the Cdr, 1 Bde, 1<sup>st</sup> ID and his staff for dinner, I cautioned the Colonel not to say anything like "tell us how we can assist you." He did not listen, before dessert he slipped, and LTC Chau, the District Chief, pulled from his pocket a list, typed, in duplicate, headed by this item: "A cistern, filled with 20,000 liters of gasoline."

The refusal of the DSA's to conduct business as usual had immediate results: the old "I don't want your advice, just give me your supplies" was not working any more. The province Chief (COL) made a tactical mistake when he requested the Province Sr Adv (LTC, US) replace four (of six) DSA's for being "uncooperative." One, maybe two he could have gotten away with, but the number "four" became our job security. The Province Chief was in a quandary, he would have to send gas to the Districts which he used to withhold or the District forces lost their mobility, medevac (FLA) capability, etc., etc.. These were some of the circumstances under which I worked.

Not very helpful was the "uneven" quality of the members of my advisory team. While I had some excellent people (DIOCC Officer; Civil Affairs Specialist (fluent in VN); radio operator and medics (three; one each mine, Mobile Advisory Tm III-2's; the CA Team's)), my NCO's were generally substandard. Most had a hidden (or not so hidden) agenda: a Vietnamese girlfriend, good black market connections, an aversion to service with an American combat unit. One of my 1LT's and a SSG did not have a line number, when I asked my boss about that he told me "just sit on them." Just in time I found out the 1LT had been caught peddling a trailer-full of captured weapons in front of III Corps HQ, the SSG was driving a 350cc Japanese motorcycle which he got for a stolen US Air Force jeep (remember unauthorized vehicles?). Mobile Advisory Teams were to train, and accompany on operations, RF companies. They consisted on paper, of a Captain and three NCO's, all with prior combat experience in Vietnam. The reality was different, MAT III-2 had a 1LT (after he was wounded, replaced by a 2LT who had one day in grade on his #2), no one in the team had prior combat experience anywhere (one of the NCO's had worked in the PX at Bien Hoa). Not surprisingly, the RF cdrs reacted unfavorably to their inexperienced advisors except for badgering them for supplies and PX goods.

Perhaps surprisingly, we did get a number of things accomplished. First, the monthly shoe-box of Vietnamese currency ("Dong") I received, called AIK ("Assistance in Kind") funds, I used almost fully to gather information, not only on the enemy but on the so called friendlies as well. (The District Chief was furious, my predecessor used to give him the whole box each month on the premise that he "knows best what to do with the money." Yeah, right!) (It was to be spent, inter alia, on paying for weapons brought in by Hoi Chanh (line crossers under the Chieu Hoi program). The good work of the DIOCC Officer and the PRU he took control of—all ex-VC, they were heartily disliked by the District Chief (DC) and his minions but did great work in their VC disguise (uniforms and weapons) going deep into the Michelin and taking out VC cadre, contributed to our intelligence successes. So did the fact that someone in the 101<sup>st</sup> NVA REGT (the commander?) Stole the cook/lover of the local force co cdr who retaliated by letting us know whenever the 101<sup>st</sup> moved in the District. We found out that the wife of the District Deputy for Admin ran a "commissary" for the VC with the help of safe conduct passes which her husband issued, and which she needed to "import" the goods into the District (the only safe way into Tri Tam for civilians was across the Saigon River bridge, controlled by the "White Mice"—white caps and shirts—of the National Police. These worthies collected a toll in a graded scale from pedestrians, ox carts, motorcyclists, cars, trucks, and buses whereby vehicles which crossed regularly paid by the month. When they thought they could get away with it, the VC set up their own tax collection in the Ben Cui area across the river). By the way, every business in Tri Tam, including the Michelin, paid taxes to the VC. The VC finance cadre rallied to us in the Michelin where he was picked up by a Huey, a hairy operation. He brought a cal .50 ammo can with tax receipts. Yes, the laundry and the barber and the souvenir stands on the base, all of them. We never found out if the workers in the base camp were taxed by the VC, I know they had to pay the police which conducted the security checks every morning at the cattle chutes. If they did not pay, or failed to volunteer for the Peoples Self-Defense Force (mostly old men and young girls), the cops prevented them from entering for three days, after which they were fired for absenteeism. Most complied before Day 3. The Dep DC's wife's supplies were delivered to the VC by the rubber workers who were taken to the block



they worked that day by Michelin trucks before the crack of dawn (the DC and I were informed which blocks they were in). About once a month we sneaked the PRU a bit into the Michelin in a couple of jeeps, when the trucks with the rubber workers arrived, tightly packed, the PRU switched their lights on, and a rain of goodies came off the trucks, such as: bags of sugar, salt, tea, rice, and tobacco, containers of cooking oil and fish sauce (nuoc mom), bicycle tires and tubes, rolls of plastic material, shirts and pants and hats, etc.--all much welcomed by the PRU. We could never stop it but put a serious dent in it. Every successful intel operation had one major side benefit: it increased the standing of the Tm 91 advisors with the Cdrs and staff of the units at Rainier, and my chances to be listened to at their councils. The new Bde Cdr told me I was his top staffer for intel, drug interdiction (a big problem!), and everything having to do with the Vietnamese. This took so much of my time that my boss, the Province Sr Adv, visited the Bde Cdr to "reclaim" me. I just worked for both then on.

The "Work Together" program, which had the 8<sup>th</sup> REGT of the 5<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division housed in the same base camp with a Bn of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry became reasonably successful after a rocky start. The US unit's participation in an air assault, let's say, guaranteed air and artillery support and dust-off. The Vietnamese performed well, the question was how would they do on their own. We had excellent cooperation with the brown water Navy's boats, to include catching a VC unit while crossing supplies on inner tubes and small rafts on the Saigon River in the lower part of the District. The biggest success of District forces came about during a company-size sweep near Ben Chua when the VN saw a guy running, then disappear in the woods. They searched diligently--one thing they did much better than the US forces -- and found a system of tunnels housing a VC/NVA radio intercept unit. They had batteries of radios, military and civilian (Japanese) and antennas made of commo wire with C-ration spoon insulators up in the trees. They had no time to destroy their maps, worksheets, or files--it was quite a catch. Of course, everything was snatched very hurriedly from the VN by US "specialists." The RF assumed control of the Saigon River bridge from the US brigade upon request of the Bde Cdr. I brokered this with a very reluctant DC who was told by his Province Chief that, if the bridge was blown, he (DC) better be on it! The VN got two conex containers full of weapons (mortars, cal .50s, and ammo to include much-desired claymores). RF provided road security along LTL 14 which worked with frequent monitoring. The RF would construct a sunscreen with ponchos and bamboo, then strip to their underwear (colorful swim trunks) and relax. One day a 229<sup>th</sup> AVN pilot reported watching two guys in red and blue swim shorts, clutching an M-60 and an M-16, running full tilt pursued by a passel of VC. The door gunners ended the foot race by hosing down the VC. After that, security improved--as long as everyone realized (as the VC surely did when they killed one of my medics on LTL 14 vic Ben Suc with an RPG round in the gas tank of his jeep, at 1600) that road security was pulled in at 1500 instead of 1700, something I was unable to correct. We had some success with night ambushes, even when they were not accompanied by (two!--at least) advisors. By getting the Bde to loan me a radar and crew, we were able to monitor the RF/PF ambush patrols, and by using tracker dogs from the Bde we could show the DC that some of his patrols would move no more that 30 meters from their start point and settle down for a quiet night. As quid pro quo, the DC allowed the staging of US ambushes out of District outposts which the VC did not expect, and the Bde got some much needed body count. Ordering the villagers not to leave the cut rice harvest in the fields overnight (and burning a few fields when that order was not followed), as well as taking all rice and threshing equipment to a central location to guard it, was a great success for the DC. First, the VC came after the rice and equipment in central storage and lost a number of KIA to ambushes. Then, overwhelmed by hunger, they would chieu hoi. That was well done. Not all action was directly war-related. With US help, several schools were built. The kids sat on wooden ammo boxes formerly used for helicopter rockets. Tragically, the VC made good on a threat to the teachers we hired and murdered three young women who were riding, all on one motorbike, along LTL 14. They also abducted the postmaster's only helper--she had mainly powered the sticky side of the stamps with US Army foot-powder against the humidity. I don't know what happened to her. With better roads and a certain amount of security, the farmers could bring their goods to market, even outside Tri Tam. The Michelin factory continued to work, albeit at 80% of capacity. The management had been threatened with nationalization if they stopped latex collection and processing. The base camp employed a considerable number of Vietnamese, their income helped make the local business profitable. A new Cao Dai temple was consecrated with proper festivities.

But, all was not well. The US forces suffered some setbacks, most of which could have been avoided by use of common sense. Troops using ski boats boarded and unloaded using the same convenient sandbar until a sapper unit ambushed them from positions dug under a stand of bamboo on the higher bank. Several lives were lost. Likewise, the Navy boats had found a bend in the river which allowed easy re-supply, to include refueling from helicopter-delivered bladders. One day, the Chinook lowering a bladder was shot down with an RPG and landed on the bladder, in the conflagration many Americans were killed. A Bn recon platoon on a night mission was hit by mortar fire and the blame was placed on the RF. Neither RF nor PF in the district were authorized mortars but some had captured or recaptured 82 mm or 60 mm /81 mm mortars, none with sights which were not needed because they fired only final defensive fires with charge zero. To that purpose the gunners had short aiming poles around their mortar pits to lay on, much as the US Army did before we introduced the panoramic sight in the mid-fifties. The real culprit was a 4.2 in mortar platoon from the base. When I learned that a 400-man infiltration group from the north was going to transit the Michelin, I notified the Brigade. One of the infantry Bns set up a U-shaped ambush, which reported that "three lousy dinks" walked down the trail between two rubber blocks, suddenly stopped, fired three shots from a rifle, and ran away. "Bad intel from the advisor!" The report I got through the PRU made clear what really happened: the three local VC guides leading the infiltrators saw an American solder take a leak against a rubber tree, and knew he would not do that unless he were part of a larger group. So, they gave the pre-arranged signal, three shots, and the infiltrators ex-filtrated. A similar incident occurred when we passed info about a VC tax collector and his bodyguards who would take a certain route to make their collections (I think the villagers wanted us to kill him to save on taxes). The group appeared where and when we had been told, but then changed course and disappeared. This time one of them had seen a glow from a cigarette, and correctly inferred American presence. After the 25<sup>th</sup> ID assumed responsibility for the base-camp and the AO, we warned them against using the roads in the plantation for vehicular traffic, and to drive down the lanes between the trees. I happened to be in the Bn TOC when the S-3 radioed he would send an M88 to retrieve an M113 which had hit a mine. "Don't bother," came the reply, "the biggest piece left will fit in a jeep trailer." No one survived. The 25<sup>th</sup> ID, with only one Inf Bn in the base-camp, wanted to

raising), armed with insulated pliers, would hover by the generators, closely watched by the amused VN grease monkeys who kept it going -- good men! SGT Oink would pick up a wire, asked the two if it powered anything in the compound. When they shook their heads (in most cases), Oink used his pliers, allowing me to observe a portion of Dau Tieng go dark. We repeated this until we ran out of wires, and waited for the morning. Early on the DC would send for me to ask for power to be restored to "critical" users: the police shack across the street, the clinic, the eternal light in church. Trouble was that from these points wires extended to other places: the police chief's house, the medic's place, and -- from the church -- mamasan's establishment which sported a (PX bought) fan in each cubicle, I was told by some of my soldiers who were customers and liked this comfort. One day a Huey landed on our pad, normally we got a call announcing visitors, not this time. Our interpreter, Minh, reported that mamasan's maidens had boarded the a/c which took off in the direction of the base camp. Some clever aviators had avoided the MP gate guards by conducting a vertical envelopment. Next day the girls were returned to the pad, allowed to stash their loot, i.e., remuneration in kind, such as fans, radios, cases of C-rations, towels, luggage, and other goods. Then the DC clapped them in jail, and mamasan sent his list of demands for me to see through one of her best customers, one of my medics, who was engaged to one of her ladies. The DC's demands included the items listed above, plus watches, cigarettes (Salem), Chanel #5, and other more easily hidden merchandise. Mamasan sent me the list to show how excessive it was, but unfamiliar with the business, I could not be of help. I'm almost certain mamasan negotiated a better deal because in two days she was back in business. By the way, the DC had instructed the sales girls at the PX not to punch the ration cards of advisors, to ensure a never-ending stream of rationed items such as watches, TV's, radios, fans, cigarettes, etc. While the self-help programs weren't funny, they were at least entertaining, and showed how far apart US programs and Vietnamese peasants really were.

The favorite self-help program was pig raising which was to demonstrate the value of collective versus the extended family. This latter concept basically means that if Nguyen Ngoc Thanh becomes village chief, he is beholden to take care of everybody in his extended family which can include vast hordes of people. This tends to elevate a number of incompetents into public employment, is not good for democracy, and decidedly un-American. Pig raising started with the distribution of cement, re-bar, and aluminum sheets (roofing) to properly house the porkers in a collective pigsty which a number of unrelated (we hope) families would use to house their pigs. Anyone who ever inspected houses in Tri Tam would readily agree that these same materials would do homestead first, leaving the pig shelters woefully incomplete. A second round of distributions fixed that, and finally, the Tam 91 agricultural advisor, "Farmer" Brown (a retired USMC Major) arrived with the first load of piglets critically eyed by their future owners. These products of Iowa were very pink and pretty, not swaybacked like a good VN pig, and (again unlike a VN pig) a trifle critical at the trough. VN families don't have a lot of table scraps, so the pig is tethered to a convenient (usually banana) tree to root around for edibles. The first deviation from the desired result, a working collective, came when pig owners used barbed-wire to divide the pigsties into individual pens. Alarmed at this breach of norm, I remonstrated only to be told that no one could be expected to watch his pig sharing slop with the neighbor's pig which isn't being fed. This made eminent sense to me, and since I had no prior experience with pigs, and SGT Oink claimed he did, I delegated my responsibility. Most of the pigs died, we got the dog platoon's vet to cut one open which he claimed housed every vermin he ever encountered in his training, plus a few he was not familiar with. The pigs were eaten anyway. The surviving pigs and the fish ("Kissing Ouampi," which Farmer Brown brought in a bucket) did not live past Tet, when, as everybody know, the VN will heap the table with everything edible. I later saw some pigsties with roofs removed, doors bricked up, and filled with water and fish. Others, also roofs removed, were stacked with 55 gallon drums with rocks on the bottom, chicken wire over the top, and kerosene lantern sitting on the wire. Hiding among the rocks were some largish (size of my hand) frogs who came out at night when the lanterns were lit which attracted abundant winged frog food that fell through the wire directly into the frog's mouths after the bug's wings caught on fire. I saw no need for American military supervision for this type of animal husbandry. I did eat some of the frogs, gutted, otherwise whole, and deep-fried. Very crunchy!

When I left Tri Tam in July of 1970, I looked back on a most interesting year. It was a tightrope act, in a way, and I recalled asking my boss, the Province Senior Advisor, for a short mission statement upon arrival. "Keep the lid on," he said, and in that I mostly succeeded. I encountered some good folks, US and VN, military and civilian. I repatriated some of the long-serving underachievers on my team, and accomplished what I think was possible with the rest. Halfway through my tenure, I was sworn into the Regular Army, Medical Service Corps because I was three days too old for an RA commission in Infantry. My new branch never got the word, so I walked around for another six months with a Car-15 and a .45 while wearing caduceus. On the flight from R&R in Sidney, a stewardess woke me: "we have an emergency in first class, doctor." That was the biggest unmet challenge of my VN assignment.

Source: Col Rudolf h. Egersdorfer, USA (Retired)

### **Extracted From A Fitness Report on Maj Egersdorfer**

In what is undoubtedly the most difficult and frustrating district of the six in this province, Major Egersdorfer has done an extraordinarily fine job as District Senior Advisor. As one of the most energetic, articulate, best informed, and hard driving District Senior Advisors, he faced with equanimity the challenges of isolated and often dangerous Tri Tam where not the least of his problems has been to deal with a very difficult and trying District Chief. The progress that has been achieved in Tri Tam in the pacification program is due largely to the persistent, untiring and persuasive efforts of the rated officer. Briefings conducted by him for all types of visitors to Tri Tam have always been noted for their in-depth knowledge of all aspects of the local situation, clarity, organization, and appropriateness for the particular visitor concerned. Major Egersdorfer also has a penchant for clear and cogent drafting. As an example, the six District Senior Advisors were recently requested to draft an analysis of pacification prospects in their districts over the next year. His product was clearly the best piece of analysis and drafting of the six. Across the board, Major Egersdorfer's performance in Tri Tam under very adverse

initiated with concentrated artillery and rocket shelling of the city, and although the initial rounds were erratic, the observers quickly adjusted fires onto the market place and the district compound. Civilian casualties were very high. Concurrent with the artillery fires into the city, the enemy began shelling outposts with mortar, missiles, and recoilless rifle fire. The first day these stand-off attacks were general and no one location was hit harder than any other. In excess of 200 rounds of artillery and rocket fire impacted around district headquarters on Day One. The purpose on Day One was probably to force non-combatants to leave the city. Day Two was characterized again by intense shelling of the city, probably designed to fix friendly forces in place while the outposts on the eastern flank were hit heavily by destructive direct and indirect fire. These two outposts were 75 - 80% destroyed as a result of the intense enemy shellings, and the friendly troops inside were forced out of the outposts into the adjacent hamlet. Next day, the enemy continued his shellings of the city and began mortaring the troops who had fled to the hamlet — Ap 5. This tactic continued until the friendly forces had been driven from Ap 5, at which time the enemy moved in. Once Ap 5 had been occupied, the enemy shifted its attention to the southernmost hamlet, Suoi Dua, and began the same type stand-off attacks against the outpost there. The enemy eventually forced civilians and soldiers out of Suoi Dua and occupied it also. Significantly, the two hamlets which fell to the enemy were only occupied for a short period (4 days) and only by platoon size forces (15 - 20 men).

Had the enemy had sufficient ground forces, he would have occupied the hamlets with more troops and held the area for a longer time. Because he did not have these troops, he was easily driven out when sufficiently outnumbered by friendly forces. Interestingly, the enemy captured the outposts and hamlets without using small arms — just mortars, RPG's, recoilless rifles, and missiles. While the outposts were being forced, the enemy continued shelling the city and even placed a squad across the river in the adjacent district to stop fleeing personnel and check them for soldiers or GVN officials. The main helicopter pad was zeroed in by artillery early on the first day, so that coupled with the strong points around the perimeter, the city was sealed.

Antiaircraft weapons were positioned with the artillery tubes and also near anticipated areas of future Tac Air employment; however, the weapons were only used in a defensive role, i.e., firing only when fired upon. Had they been used more offensively, they would have had a deciding impact on insuring the seal of the city.

After the enemy was driven from the hamlets, the incoming rounds were markedly reduced until the firing ceased on 21 November. This can be attributed to three things: (1) resupply was difficult for the US made weapons, (2) air strikes on supply caches further restricted the amount of ammunition available, and (3) the enemy received new orders to conserve ammunition for the next offensive which will probably be launched just prior to the next announced cease fire date.

The enemy effectively employed economy of force operations in Tri Tam. In so doing, he served two purposes. He forced the friendly forces to fragment their attention and he tricked the GVN officials into thinking there was more enemy than there really was. In effect, it was a mixture of guerrilla tactics using conventional forces and equipment. Still, the enemy was faced with personnel problems. Severely hurt by the Spring Offensive, the NVA, I feel, was forced to use untrained troops and "cooks and bottle washers" for soldiers and crew members on support weapons. Strong indications of this were the lack of aggressiveness and tenacity characteristically exhibited by NVA soldiers.

It is unknown how many casualties the enemy suffered. He was hurt by Tac Air, especially in his support activities. I feel Tac Air located and damaged his large caliber artillery and much of his stockpiled ammunition early. We know for sure a forward observer was killed during the fighting in Ap 5. Effective enemy shelling was curtailed as a result of his death. Ground operations subsequent to 20 November have yielded numerous graves and decomposed bodies, but a definite count is not known. Whether or not the enemy was hurt too much to launch another effective operation will have to be seen.

Facing these 100(+) NVA soldiers were 10 PF platoons, initially 4 then 6 RF companies, 2 Ranger companies, 1 Armored CAV Troop, and a battery of artillery, plus headquarters personnel. Total friendly forces numbered in excess of 1000 — a 10 to 1 ratio.

Equipment		Equipment	
Artillery	4 tubes of 105 mm	.50 MG	16
Mortars	four 82 mm & seven 60 mm		
APC's	15	Small arms & automatic weapons organic to each of the units.	

The April Offensive in Tri Tam set the stage for this offensive. By rolling up outposts and forcing GVN forces back into Tri Tam City and its vicinity, the enemy gained free access to 99% of the AO and operational patterns. Had this not been the case, the GVN troops had operated more aggressively with deep penetrations into enemy territory, this siege would not have been as effective as it was. This lack of aggressiveness prevailed throughout this offensive. As soon as the shelling began, all operations ceased and the troops holed up in their outposts. Rather than go out where the risk of casualties was less and look for the enemy, the troops stayed in the outposts where they became "sitting ducks" for the enemy's direct and indirect fire attacks. Only after losing two outposts and one hamlet, i.e. when the situation became politically grim, were the counter operations started. By that time, the enemy had inflicted significant damage to personnel, property, and morale. Planned operations, when finally initiated, showed a disregard for the principles of war, in particular mass, offensive, maneuver, and surprise. The plans consistently had the friendly forces attacking head on (as the enemy knew they would), with no consideration for flanking action or achieving a satisfactory attacker: defender ratio. When contact was established, invariably the procedure was to break contact immediately, pull back, and ask for Tac Air. Finally, the one asset which could have put a quick end to enemy threat

America came in regularly except for two days following a close call they had with incoming artillery.

Civilian losses and damage were high. There were 18 KIA and 28 WIA by enemy fires. There were even reports of the enemy capturing two young people to carry supplies. 112 homes were totally destroyed and in excess of 100 homes were 50% or more damaged. Approximately 90% of the populace left the city, with 2500 going to the refugee camp at Binh Duong and the remainder staying with friends at Tay Ninh or the Ben Cui Rubber Plantation in Khien Hanh District. With the exception of a few Chinese merchants who stayed in the city, economic activity came to a halt. Prices went up and those who stayed and kept their stores open fared well. Major hamlet and village level officials and all district officials stayed. They were valuable in accumulating data on damage, casualties, and population count. Forty seven (47) hard core PSDF were accounted for on the first day with this number gradually increasing to 80 (+) before the offensive ended. Even though this is a small number, it is significant because none stayed in Tri Tam during the April Offensive. Increased confidence in the GVN coupled with the recently completed PSDF training were contributory factors to the loyalty of these few. One district official was assassinated in Ben Cui on the first day.

Rumors I had heard for many months prior to becoming an advisor were confirmed. We were not advisors, but were relegated to the role of air asset coordinators. It seems the Vietnamese have had enough advice. Our efforts to get the VN to use their own assets were not effective because after a while, with our own lives being threatened and no VN support, we were forced to call for US assets. At that time, the Vietnamese saw we could get US support and the "put the monkey on the back of the Vietnamese" concept was shattered. As can be seen from Tac Air statistics, we spoiled them again, but only out of necessity.

The district chief held the town and GVN forces together during the siege. He was called to Province for a meeting on the second day, and with his subordinates in charge, the eastern flank of the city collapsed. Not that they were incompetent, it is just that they have never been given the opportunity to do anything on their own. The district chief, in a true Vietnamese manner, has always done everything tactically himself, and when he left, the subordinates didn't know what to do and pride kept them from asking advisors for assistance. This lack of subordinate development hurt, but when the district chief returned, he quickly got control of the situation and eventually recovered all lost territory. Leadership at the RF/PF level varied. The 321 RF Bn had been led poorly for many months. When the commander was killed, it only further weakened a bad situation, which was culminated by 3-321 abandoning its outpost without permission. This battalion less its 4th Company was wisely sent back to Province for retraining. PF leaders were generally strong, but surprisingly, the two PF platoons to be forced out of their outposts had the strongest leaders. Later interviews with them revealed their men were new and inexperienced in combat and were overwhelmed by events. Granted they took a heavy beating, but morale and experience were also contributory. I also feel morale was the principle reason for the GVN lack of aggressiveness. Whether this could be attributed entirely to morale, I cannot say. However, in all units, rumors of cease fires were rampant and everywhere was the subconscious fear of being the last Vietnamese soldier to die before the cease fire. Low morale was the cause of more failures than was enemy activities.

This siege was unique in that the enemy used maximum support weapons but minimum ground forces. As far as I can recall, this is the first time that such large caliber weapons, both Soviet and captured US, have been used so close to Saigon. Additionally, the introduction of wire guided missiles, although not new in MR III, was significant because of the proximity to the Vietnamese capital. Raining in excess of 800 artillery and rocket rounds alone and innumerable mortar, recoilless rifle, RPG, and missile rounds onto the city, the enemy inflicted severe casualties on both military personnel and non combatants. As has been the case in similar situations throughout the country, Tac Air support was the deciding factor in neutralizing the enemy. Although support for both friendly and enemy forces was very effective, it only added more credence to the fact that total success is only possible through the use of ground troops. The failure of the NVA to use ground troops resulted in them not being able to capture the city. The failure of the GVN to effectively use ground forces was the reason the siege lasted so long.

Due to its scope and control level, I do not feel GVN forces could have prevented this enemy operation. However, many things, had they been taken advantage of, could have stopped it shortly after its start, namely:

- a. Initiating offensive operations immediately after the attack started rather than hole up in outposts.
- b. Having initiated counter operations, going after the enemy aggressively, and making deep thrusts into his rear area positions.
- c. Employing close air support to neutralize hard targets and interdict rear area activities instead of using it against enemy squad positions which can be handled by ground troops and organic support weapons.
- d. Using imagination and the principles of war in planning operations and out-thinking the enemy.
- e. Using the Armored CAV. Its firepower is far superior to anything the enemy has. Add to this its maneuver capability and shock effect, and the enemy will think twice before putting up a stubborn fight. After all, he is as frightened of armored vehicles as anyone else.
- f. Putting the Air CAV under control of ground commanders. If not, then keep them out of the area. Do not even send them up to look for trails and bunkers on the fringe areas. That is frustrating.
- g. Coordinating B52 strikes with ground commanders.
- h. Employing the 306 RF Bn in the rubber on multiple LZ's to neutralize and capture enemy personnel and equipment. As it was, by sending them up as reinforcements, it only meant there were 900 GVN troops in static positions instead of 700.
- i. Finally, controlling rumors. Rather than allow an atmosphere develop in which rumors can be generated, develop an atmosphere which gives the soldiers something to have confidence in. This can be helped by choosing only the best leaders regardless of previous assignments or date of rank.

VIET NAM WAS TEMPORARY



BLACK WIDOW PRIDE IS FOREVER

DIET HPN 171



A black and white photograph showing a military helicopter, likely a UH-1 Huey, in flight over a desert landscape. The helicopter is seen through the sights of a weapon, which is in the foreground, partially obscuring the view. The weapon's sights and a portion of its barrel are visible on the right side of the frame. The helicopter is positioned in the center-left of the frame, flying towards the right. The background shows a hazy, mountainous desert terrain under a cloudy sky.

"MISSION ACCOMPLISHED - JOB WELL DONE"

"FORM 'EM UP - TAKE 'EM HOME"

"BLACK WIDOW 6-OUT"